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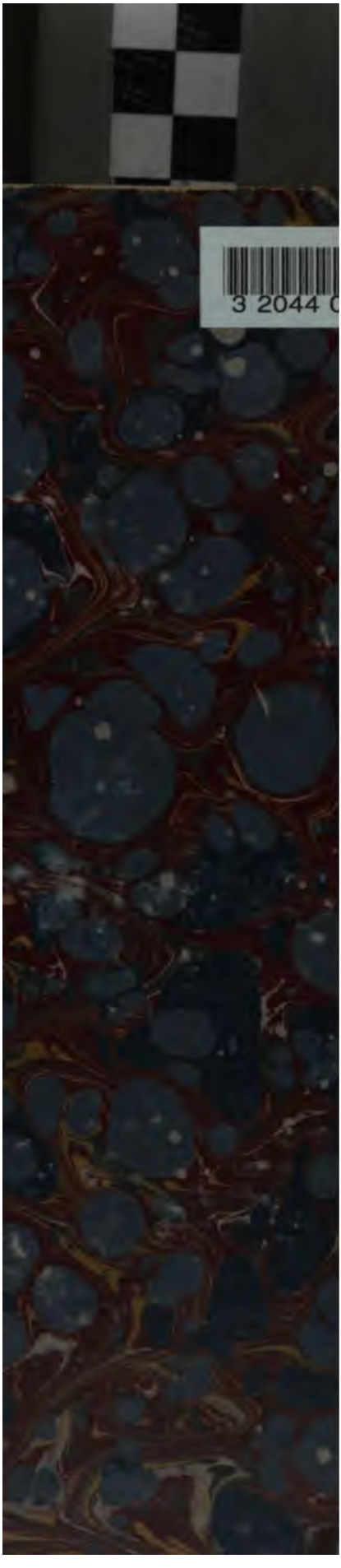
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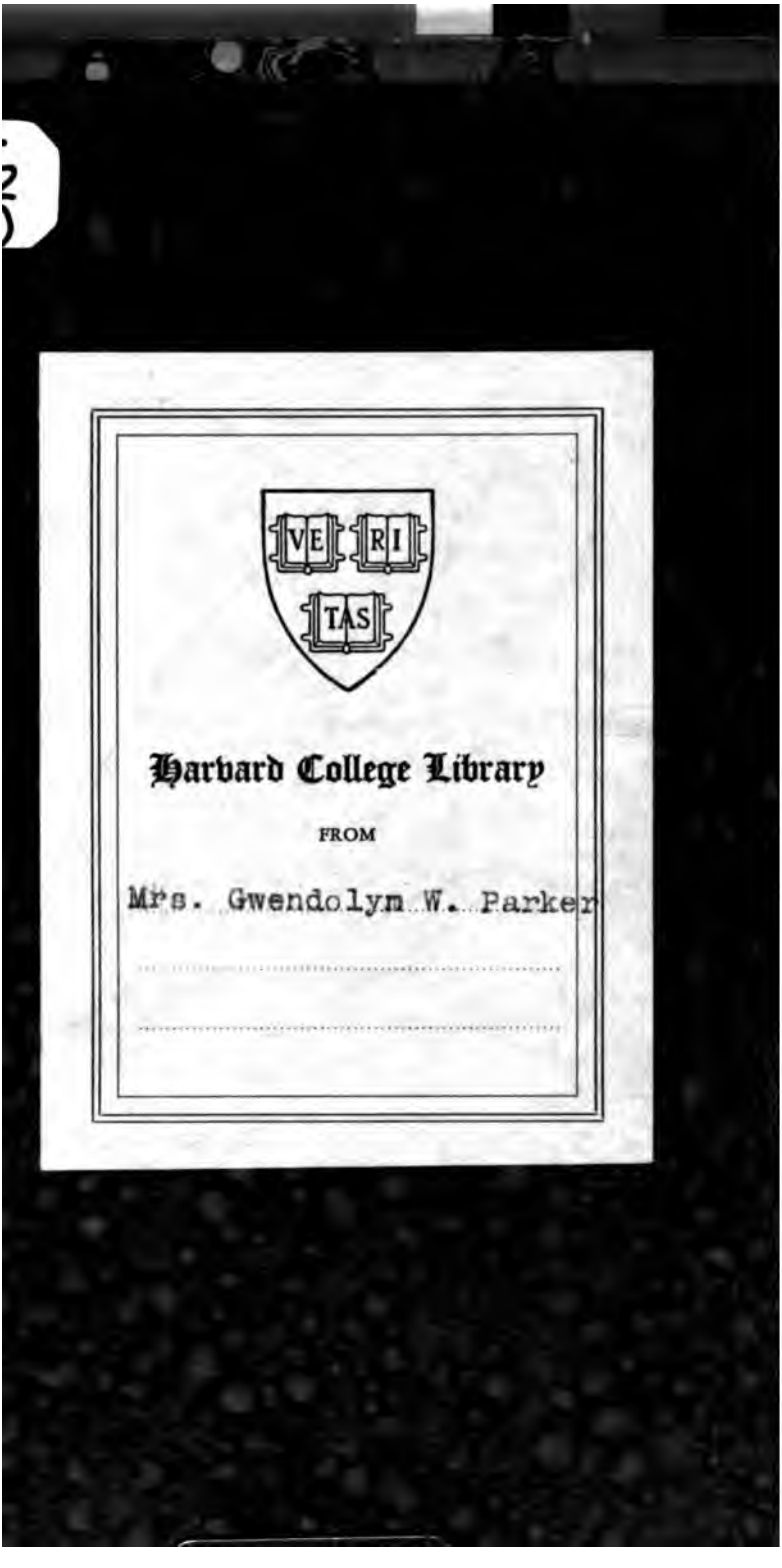
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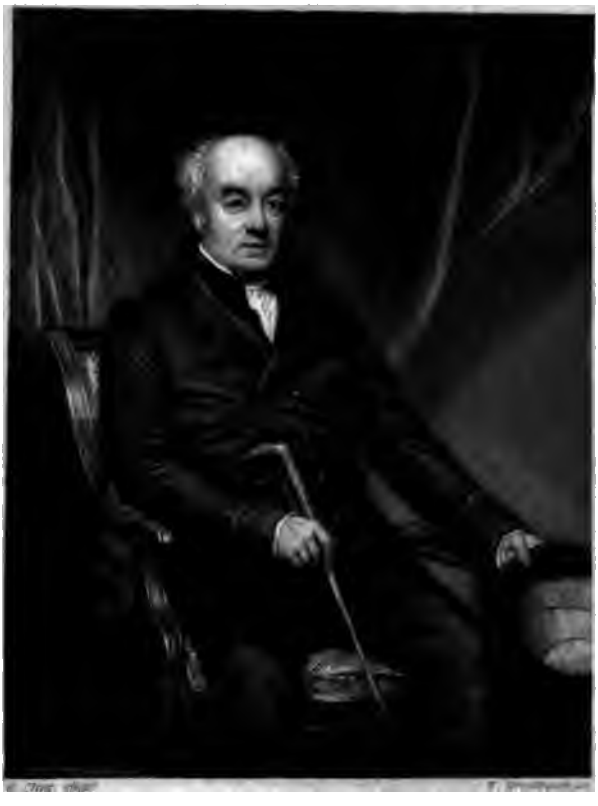

MEMOIRS

OF

JOHN BANNISTER,

COMEDIAN.

BY JOHN ADOLPHUS, ESQ.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON:
RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET,
Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty.
1839.

TO THE

MEMBERS OF THE GARRICK CLUB,

THESE MEMOIRS

OF

THE LATE JOHN BANNISTER,

THE LAST, AND PERHAPS THE MOST HIGHLY FAVOURED PUPIL

OF THAT UNRIVALLED

MASTER OF THE HISTRIONIC ART,

WHOSE FAME IS PERPETUATED BY THEIR INSTITUTION,

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PREFACE.

FROM the cares of an anxious profession, and from the labours of an important literary work, the continuation of "The History of England," I have snatched the hours necessary for the completion of my present undertaking.

My motives for writing the life of my excellent friend, are fully and fairly disclosed in the first chapter. In pursuing my task, I have enjoyed all the luxury of agreeable recollections and of warm and hearty feelings.

I cannot of course contemplate with indifference the probable reception of this production. I know how useless it is by professions or apologies to conciliate favourable opinions or to deprecate merited censures, but I trust to the candour of the public to view with kindness the effort to depict an individual always distinguished by talent and virtue, and always attended by prosperity and applause.

If such a memoir does not present the varieties

of interest which presumption, folly, or vice are calculated to produce in biographical records; if no arduous or doubtful struggles affect the feelings or suspend the judgment; yet it is hoped that, without those aids, the life of a good and accomplished man will not be found uninteresting.

On one point, at least, I can fairly lay claim to approbation. No individual, of whatever age, will find in these pages an incentive to vice, or a palliation of dishonour, falsehood, or meanness. The character I have pourtrayed rose above these blemishes, and it may fearlessly be set as an example to all in whom it is desirable to inculcate the moral lesson, that there is no walk or pursuit in human life in which just feelings and honourable sentiments may not be advantageously exercised.

LONDON,
July 1838.

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MEMOIRS

OF

JOHN BANNISTER.

CHAPTER I.

1760—1778.

Introductory Observations.—Birth of John Bannister.—Condition and progress in life of his Father, Charles Bannister.—Commencement of his Dramatic Career;—Deptford—Norwich—and Ipswich.—Engaged by Foote at the Haymarket.—His Talent as a Mimic,—as a Singer.—He obtains an Engagement at Drury Lane.—Celebrated as a Wit, and beloved for his convivial qualities.—His want of Economy.—Anecdote.—Education of John Bannister.—An Error respecting his early Appearance on the Stage—examined and refuted.—His Taste for Painting—encouraged by his Father.—Student at the Royal Academy.—Intended for a Pupil of De Loutherbourg—how disappointed.—His frolicsome humour.—He quits the Academy.—Generally beloved.

A FRIENDSHIP of many years' duration, terminated only by his death, impels me to lay before the public, a memoir of the life of the late JOHN BANNISTER. In executing this task, I am exempted from the difficulties that so frequently beset the author of a friendly biographical essay: I have no vices

to conceal, no faults to palliate, no contradictions to reconcile, no ambiguities of conduct to explain; I purpose to narrate the life of a man whose characteristic integrity and buoyant benevolence were always apparent in his simulated characters, and who, in real life, proved that those exhibitions were not assumed for the mere purposes of his profession, but that his great success in his difficult career arose, in no small degree, from that truth and sincerity which diffused their influence over the personages he represented.

From the intoxicating excitement of popularity and public admiration, the failure of his health drove him, at a comparatively early period, into retirement; but his excellent spirits, his unfailing good-humour, his benevolence, and his amenity, never failed. In the possession of a happy independence, he never affected an ostentatious display of affluence; but his charity, his goodness, and his endearing manners were extensively known and justly appreciated. He passed the evening of his days amidst a circle of affectionate friends, and in the bosom of a numerous family, who were all cheered by the rays of his kindness, and fostered by the warmth of his benevolence.

John Bannister was born at Deptford, the 12th day of May 1760. His entrance on the stage of the world was distinguished by a comic anecdote, which, in his latter days, he was used to relate with great

glee and characteristic humour. When the moment of his birth was approaching, his grandmother, with the superstition of anility, ran to the cupboard for a silver spoon, which she placed between his lips, that he might possess the popular title to good-luck derived from being born with "a silver spoon in his mouth."

At the time of his birth, his father, Charles Bannister, was a favourite performer on the English stage. He was a native of Gloucestershire; but an appointment in the Victualling Office had induced his parent to fix himself at Deptford, and, from his seventh year, that was Charles's habitual abode. Gifted with a manly form, an ardent mind, and an uncommon flow of wit, it is not surprising that he was, in early life, captivated by the manners of a company of players who frequented the place of his father's residence — that he attached himself to their society, and aspired to tread the same path in life with them. Like most young aspirants, he was first struck with the charms of the Tragic Muse; and before he had accomplished his eighteenth year, he had, as an amateur, received the applauses of the Deptford audience in Romeo, in Richard, and probably in some other characters. The stage-door of a London theatre was not to be so easily opened: he was refused an engagement at Drury Lane, the characters he aspired to being already in the possession of

other performers; but Norwich, Ipswich, and the towns forming that theatrical circuit, made amends for his disappointment, and in that region, he soon obtained favour and reputation.

In this company, his talents gained the attention of Foote, who, labouring under some difficulties with respect to his usual evening theatrical performances, devised a new plan,—that of giving a species of dramatic entertainment at the Haymarket in the day-time, under the semblance of lectures. His first production in this way was "The Orators," in which, in 1762, Bannister represented an Oxford student named Will Tirehack, come to town for a frolic with his friend Harry Scamper, represented by John Palmer, who on this occasion also made his first appearance. The abilities of Bannister were speedily discovered and appreciated. Tragedy no longer formed the point of his ambition, but he established a considerable reputation in comedy, and was acknowledged to be an admirable mimic. His power as a singer, on which his subsequent prosperity mainly depended, was not at first made conspicuous.

At the period of his appearance, theatrical singing was an art very different from what it has become in later times. In those days, every body sang;—ladies and gentlemen in the course of their employment or recreation, artisans and servants at their

work, men and women passing through the streets, all, according to their several powers, solaced themselves with a song. At table, after meals, songs were called for; and at public dinners, hired singers did not form an item in the bill, but every one who possessed the ability, in a degree however humble, obeyed the call of the chairman, or yielded to the solicitation of the company. The consequence was, that a great treasure of talent was often produced, and individuals whose instructions in the art had not enabled them to distinguish on paper one clef or even one note from another, with a very little teaching, became excellent singers, and obtained high and distinguished popularity. A long list might be made of persons so circumstanced; nor would it, in the slightest degree, derogate from the merits of those who, having aided great natural gifts by study and practice, have become the ornaments of their profession and the delight of society.

Charles Bannister was one of the untaught class. His voice, uniting, in extraordinary perfection, the extremes of a deep bass and high-toned falsetto, and his ear, which was of great delicacy and perfection, enabled him not only to execute pieces of ordinary description, but to represent, with great humour, and without the grossness of burlesque or caricature, many leading performers of the day, both male and female. These displays first took place at

the Haymarket, Foote having given means for introducing them into "The Orators;" they were soon very celebrated; and when Mr. Garrick took Giardini to examine Bannister's imitations of Tenducci and Champneys, the composer declared the likenesses perfect, with only one fault,—that the voice of the mimic was better than that of either of the performers.

Garrick engaged him, in 1767, to play Merlin in his dramatic romance of "Cymon." The proprietors of Ranelagh and Marylebone Gardens gladly availed themselves of his services; and at the Haymarket he was always considered a sterling acquisition.

He was also much celebrated as a wit. From a very early period of our social annals there have been men who were acknowledged lords of this manor; and to them, undoubtedly, many strays were brought, in which they had originally no property. From Scoggan and Will Summers, in the times of Henry the Eighth, to those of which we are writing, a succession might be deduced of persons to whom this inheritance had fallen. The only chasms, perhaps, would be, in the reign of Queen Mary, and the domination of Cromwell! In the list would be found men of all ranks and professions;—Ben Jonson and Tarlton, Rochester and Killigrew, Dean Swift and Joe Miller; Lord Chesterfield, Quin, George Selwyn, Jack Wilkes, and Charles Bannister.

The detail might be followed out and garnished with another list, including Sheridan, Jekyll, and also some persons who are not named because still alive. Of all these, genuine good sayings have been recorded, and to each of them witticisms have been imputed which were invented by minor and less distinguished wits, or vamped up from old collections and revivified under the sanction of their renown. "*Les bons mots*," Voltaire observes, "*se redisent toujours*."

Charles Bannister possessed, in high perfection, the faculty of repartee, unimpaired by any display of spleen or malevolence: his hits were therefore always well received. He was, at this time, eminently in favour with the public, upon whom his truly English style of singing and acting had made a powerful impression; he was greatly esteemed in all convivial and social circles, where his never-failing good-humour and versatile talent occasioned his company to be generally courted, and among whom his affability, candour, and plain integrity procured him the title of "Honest Charles Bannister."

In one virtue he was grossly deficient—prudence. His gains were anticipated, or spent as soon as received; and, amidst all the honours of good theatrical engagements, professional renown, and popular partiality, he was doomed to experience that which men negligent in the important particular of pecuniary exactness ever must feel,—the uncertainties of

want, the insolence of small creditors, the sneers of the upstart, and the animadversions of the grave. On this subject I may revive one of his pleasantries. In 1781, when the poisoning of Sir Theodosius Boughton by a distillation of the laurel-leaf was the subject of general conversation, "Pooh!" said Charles, "don't tell me of your laurel-leaves; I fear none but a *bay-leaf*."

Such was the position in life of Charles Bannister during the early years of his son, whose character and opinions would necessarily receive a tinge from those of his father, although they were never so deeply imbued as to render their colours precisely the same. From his father he might derive a love of theatrical life, a taste for pleasure, a desire to shine in society, and a firm confidence in his own talents and resources; but principle and pride, a due self-consideration, and a horror of a mean and dependent state, made him avoid the degradations attendant on embarrassed circumstances, and, keeping his faculties free from the depression which too often results from pecuniary difficulty, left him always at full liberty to employ his talents to the best advantage, and assured to him the respectful consideration of those who might otherwise have exhibited the lofty airs of patronage, or the supercilious affectation of unmerited condescension. Early in life he was taught, by a severe lesson, the value

of pecuniary independence, and the slights which result from its absence. While at school, the master, being in poor circumstances, did not supply his pupils with the best provisions. The boys became indignant, and Bannister, one of the most high-spirited, was appointed to head a deputation and represent their grievances. The master received them mildly, and while he expressed his regret, observed, in a very pointed manner, to the spokesman of the party, that if the fathers of some of his scholars would pay their bills more regularly, he could afford them better provisions. This rebuke was well understood, and sank deep into the heart of the abashed leader, who would rather have starved than uttered another complaint. To a late period of his life Bannister mentioned this little anecdote, and while relating it, seemed to be still sensible of the pain which, in his very early days, it had occasioned him.

In the seminary where this occurred, Bannister received what in those days was termed a good education; that is to say, such a portion of instruction as would fit him for any course of life which he could be expected to fill. What that course should be was not early decided. The theatre does not seem to have been at all contemplated; for however predisposition, genius, association, and family example might be supposed to indicate that as a

pursuit, experience and observation had taught his father to consider the frequency of failure, and the unproductive results of success, and to calculate the appalling disproportion between the number of those who derived from the theatre honourable support and the prospect of respectable retirement, and of those who, from a youth of high excitement, cheered perhaps by gleams of popularity and fortune, lapsed into premature old age, brooding over the wreck of their powers and the failure of their hopes, overwhelmed in poverty and neglect.

These observations lead me to notice a fiction which I had heard long ago, and which of late has been revived, and particularly since Bannister's death, in a work called the Obituary; that he played the Duke of York to Garrick's Richard the Third in 1764. I have before me a memorandum in his own hand which places his first appearance fourteen years later; and he has, on various occasions, made similar memorandums in writing, and, in the hearing of all his friends, frequently made the same assertion. It is also to be noticed that in 1764 Mr. Garrick did not play Richard at Drury Lane, for he was on the Continent. He left England in September 1763, and returned in April 1765. During his absence, Richard was performed but twice, and then the chief character was filled by Holland. Sensible, perhaps, of this error, other

narrators have changed the scene, and supposed the appearance to have been at Ipswich: but it hardly needs to be remarked that, even in a country theatre, a boy of four years old could not have been produced to represent the arch, satirical little duke, whose witty jibes possess sufficient fire to inflame the anger of his bloodthirsty uncle, and draw from Buckingham the surmise that he had been "instructed by his subtle mother to taunt and scorn him thus opprobriously." But the difficulty meets with an easy solution, when it is known that there was at the time a player at Drury Lane, named J. Bannister, who probably was very young; he may in 1764 have been a boy qualified from his size and appearance to pass for the Duke of York; but at a time when the subject of this memoir was only thirteen or fourteen, the other was an established and frequent performer: he played, in 1772, Mervin in "The Maid of the Mill," Alexas in "All for Love," a messenger in Home's tragedy of "Alonzo," Lord William in "The Countess of Salisbury," Claremont in "Philaster," and Abram in "Harlequin's Invasion," being for a benefit which he had jointly with Mr. W. Barry. In the following season, he acted the second Dane, on the revival of "Alfred;" the Secretary in "The Note of Hand," a farce by Cumberland; and on the 5th of May 1774, he had a joint benefit with Griffiths, and

performed Sealand in "The Maid of Kent." What became of him afterwards, I know not; but it is quite certain he was a very different person from the son of Charles, although it is very probable that his name may have led to the mistake I have endeavoured to correct. If an additional proof of the mistake were necessary, it is supplied by the Dramatic Censor, published in 1770. The author mentions Mr. Bannister as very capable of Henry the Fourth, and parts of that cast. This could not be said of Charles, who had already well established himself in a line very different, and far superior; and surely it will not be supposed that a boy of ten years old could support the character of "the subtle politician Bolingbroke,"—the royal statesman advanced in years and broken by labours—the father of the sprightly, joyous, adventurous Prince Hal.

Our Bannister possessed, in his youth, a great taste for the art of painting: he retained the predilection to the end of his life; and had not his passion for the stage counteracted it, he probably would have become a great proficient. In his earliest days, he sketched, according to his infantine ability, such objects and persons as were supplied to his mind by scenes at the theatre; he afterwards attained to the drawing of heads, and his father encouraged his propensity by giving him a shilling, as pocket-money, for each production of his pencil. A characteristic

joke on this subject is related in an old collection of theatrical anecdotes, published in 1792, and entitled "The Secret History of the Green-room." The author says, "Whenever Jack was in want of money, he retouched one of his old drawings, knowing that his father's discrimination was not the most acute. One evening, being in want of a small sum, he made a few alterations in an old head, and carried it, in hopes of the usual douceur, to his father, who was in waiting to go on the stage. He pointed out the various beauties, but without receiving the gratuity—he repeated his observations three or four times, but still without effect, until he was obliged to come to the point by begging the loan of a shilling; when his father somewhat warmly replied, "Why, d—me, you are just like an ordinary! come when you will, it 's a shilling a-head."

In making one of these demands, or on some occasion which caused a moment's anger, he showed that he possessed a good share of his father's characteristic quickness. "Jack, you dog!" said the old gentleman, "I 'll cut you off with a shilling." "I wish, father," he replied, "you would give it me now." The delighted parent instantly relaxed, and rewarded him with much more than he asked.

Speedily he rose above these expedients, and became a student at the Royal Academy for a short

time, as pupil of the celebrated De Loutherbourg, whom a punning Irishman in "The Maid of the Oaks" called Mr. Lanternberg,—and his brothers of the brush adopted the quibble, only transforming it into Leatherbag. His reception into the list of this artist's pupils was not unattended with difficulty. It had been stipulated that he should receive his instructions for four years, with board and lodging in the family, at fifty pounds per annum; but some circumstances induced the prudent Alsatian to require the whole payment at once, in advance. Charles Bannister might as well have been required to pay off the national debt—or, what it was then the fashion to talk of, the Manilla ransom—as to "raise up at once the gross sum of two hundred guineas. But what of that?"—a benevolent lady, the Honourable Mrs. Dutton, promised to pay the sum, and left home in her carriage for the purpose; but an accident compelled her to return: she was taken ill, and in a fortnight was carried forth to her grave.

Bannister, although not a pupil of De Loutherbourg, was still a student of the Royal Academy, in company with Rowlandson, afterwards so celebrated as a caricaturist; the mutual advisers of each other's studies,—more frequently the prompters of each other's tricks, to the great annoyance of poor old George Michael Moser, the keeper of the Academy. Perseverance would probably have

made him an excellent artist; but instead of delineating faces, he spent his time in acting characters. As Nollekins observed, "he used to frighten our old John (meaning Moser) devilishly, with his tragedy tricks;" and the more regular artists were glad when he left them. This joy arose avowedly from their being freed from an encumbrance on their grave pursuits; it was unattended with any feelings of disrespect; on the contrary, Mr. Moser liked him so well, that he took a whole box to witness his first appearance.

CHAPTER II.

1778.

Bannister resolves to be a Player.—Character of Mr. Garrick as a Manager. — Person and attainments of Bannister. — His predilection for Tragedy. — His first interview with Mr. Garrick described by himself. — His recitation of Hamlet. — Garrick instructs him in several Characters.—He appears at the Haymarket as Dick in The Apprentice. — Spouting Clubs.—Celebrity of Woodward in Dick. — Bannister speaks the Prologue — His complete success. — His Mimicry—Observations on that talent. Tarlton — Molière — Garrick — Henderson — Mathews.—The fair and proper scope of Mimicry.—Anecdote of Mr. Bensley—and of Bannister.

FATE, or, what is often mistaken for it, the unresisted current of inclination, had now fixed the future course of John Bannister;—he was to be an actor. He was not to begin the world as an itinerant, seeking a precarious subsistence and establishing an evanescent reputation in the provinces: his person was well known in the Drury Lane greenroom, from his frequent visits; his handsome features and sparkling eyes had already attracted notice, and procured him the flattering nickname of Cupid. Besides, his father, who was now constantly

engaged, and in the height of his reputation and popularity, was sufficiently esteemed to assure to his son a ready introduction. Bannister had in his boyish days often been despatched with messages or letters from his father to the manager, and he used to recount in his later years the sportive tricks in which that great performer frequently indulged. Sometimes, putting on a frowning countenance, he would feign anger; at others, deafness: sometimes he affected hesitation in his speech, or, in perusing one letter, changed his tone and countenance in the most ludicrous manner. When he observed that his juvenile auditor could with difficulty maintain an appearance of decent gravity, he would himself relax into unrestrained laughter; and then, after a lecture in pompous burlesque, would insist on, and give, an example of the most respectful and highly-finished obeisance.

Of all the men who ever undertook that laborious, delicate, and invidious employment, Mr. Garrick seems to have been best adapted to be manager of a metropolitan theatre. Education qualified him to be a judge of dramatic poetry, and, with the aid of nature, to be a respectable dramatic poet himself, not only in the writing and alteration of plays, but in the production of prologues, the best, according to Dr. Johnson, which had been recited since the day of Dryden. As an actor, he was not merely

great, but greatest, in all the modes of exhibition, from heart-rending tragedy to the lightest comedy, and even to broad farce. Lear, and Richard; Don Felix, Ranger, Marplot, Scrub, and Abel Drugger, all alike were his. Associating daily with scholars and wits, with nobles and with eminent statesmen, no man in the green-room or before the curtain could, if they were so disposed, insinuate a phrase of contempt or an intimation of inferiority. Long experience and an accurate perception made him a refined and exact judge of public taste and feeling; and he could, by his authority and the force of his reputation, without apprehension of cabal, or fear of resistance, assign the proper employment to all his performers, excite their useful efforts, restrain their exuberances, and, by his care and judgment, give to their talents their most effective direction. In fact, a cabal against him would have been a hopeless undertaking. The stage, where he had shone, could not exist without him; and, independently of the phalanx of rank and talent with which he was surrounded, the public had adopted and made him their own; they appreciated his powers, they loved his person, and they would never have sanctioned any sullen resistance to his influence, or malignant attack on his superiority. In several popular phrases his name was used proverbially: "as deep as Garrick," "as gay as Garrick," were ordinay expres-

sions; and when a person did anything remarkably well, he was told, by way of encouragement and applause, "that 's your Garrick!"

Such a manager was qualified to form a school; and the school of Garrick, now entirely exhausted, was an unrivalled combination of excellence in all lines and departments. Habit and judgment made him an economist; but whatever exceptions might be taken, or whatever clamours raised, by those who preferred glare and equipage to nature and truth, there is no reason for saying that the real interest of the house, or the genuine pleasure of the town, was ever encroached upon by his parsimony. One result is very obvious: when he retired, he left the theatre uncharged with debt, and found himself enabled to end his days, not in a state of independence only, but of opulence.

At the time when he presented himself before this formidable judge, Bannister had not accomplished his eighteenth year. Nature had been liberal in her gifts. He was of a good height, elegantly proportioned, with an eye equally endowed with fire and with softness, and a voice of great compass, capable of minute modulation. With these advantages he combined the graces conferred at the schools of dancing and fencing. He wore his sword like a gentleman, drew it well, and used it, not, as some have done, like a bill-hook, but with be-

coming grace and elegance. His deportment, regulated by the system which dancing-masters taught and gentlemen practised in those days, was firm, easy, and, on proper occasions, dignified; but, when he relaxed, he could substitute for the subdued graces derived from the *minuet de la cour*, the jig of the peasant, the hornpipe of the sailor, or the frisk attitude and action of Harlequin.

Like most other young men who aspire to dramatic fame, his imagination was fired with the charms of tragedy: indeed, the illusion is almost irresistible. Characters in low comedy are generally void of intellectual attraction; a man does not at first wish to devote his life to the single purpose of being laughed at: genteel comedy has more charms; but the elevated and impressive characters, such as Lord Townley, and Sir Charles Easy, are few, and require a solidity of person and manner which young men in general cannot even flatter themselves that they possess; while the lighter personages, Benedick, Archer, and Ranger, present themselves as being easily within the grasp of him who possesses the power to represent the Danish prince, the Scottish tyrant, or the juvenile hero of the Grampian Hills. Impassioned dialogue, fierce defiance, amorous regret, proud impatience, and animated soliloquy adorned with all the beauties of poetic imagination, powerfully allure the youthful

mind, and make many forget in themselves, what must be obvious to all others, the impediments to success which the hand of nature, or the want of instruction, has interposed.

Such as he was, Bannister presented himself before the British Roscius,—Roscius! a name not conferred in the hasty levity of fashionable admiration, but earned by long labour and unrivalled success from the wary judgment of the critic, the orator, and the poet. At a late period of his life, Bannister described this awful interview, in a discourse delivered for public entertainment, with so much force and nature, and, as I am told, with so exact a personation of the manager's voice, action, and manner, that I can but imperfectly do it justice by transcribing it from his manuscript, leaving to such of my readers as did not hear him deliver it, the regret which such a loss must necessarily occasion.

"I was a student of painting in the Royal Academy when I was introduced to Mr. Garrick, under whose superior genius the British stage bloomed and flourished beyond all former example. In my first interview with him, I expressed my desire of quitting the study I then pursued, for the stage. After frequent visits to him he was pleased to say that he perceived a—a—a something in me which conveyed a—a promise, a—an indication of theatrical talent; and here I am led into an imitation—(I beg pardon,)

I mean an humble attempt at imitation, — of his manner in private. He had a sort of a—a—a kind of a—a hesitation in his speech, a habit of indecision which never marked his public exertions.

"One morning I was shown into his dressing-room, where he was before the glass, preparing to shave; a white night-cap covered his forehead; his chin and cheeks were enveloped in soap-suds; a razor-cloth was placed upon his left shoulder; and he turned and smoothed his shining blade upon the strop with as much dexterity as if he had been bred a barber at the Horse-Guards, and shaved for a penny: and I longed for a beard that I might imitate his incomparable method of handling the razor.

"'Eh! well—what! young man—so, eh?' (this was to me,) 'so you are still for the stage? Well, how —what character do you—should you like to—eh?'

"'I should like to attempt Hamlet, sir.'

"'Eh! what? Hamlet the Dane! 'Zounds! that's a bold—have you studied the part?'

"'I have, sir.'

"'Well, don't mind my shaving, — speak the speech—the speech to the ghost,—I can hear you,— never mind my shaving.'

"After a few hums and haws, and a disposing of my hair so that it might stand on end,

'Like quills upon the fretful porcupine,'

I supposed my father's ghost before me, armed 'cap-a-pie;' and off I started.

'Angels, and ministers of grace, defend us!'—

He wiped the razor,—

'Be thou a spirit of health, or goblin damn'd,'—

he strapped the razor,—

'Bring with thee airs from heaven, or blasts from hell,'—

he shaved on,—

'Thou com'st in such a questionable shape
That I will speak to thee!'—

he took himself by the nose,—

'I 'll call thee Hamlet,
King, father, royal Dane.—O, answer me!
Let me not burst in ignorance.'

He lathered on. I concluded, but still continued my attitude, expecting prodigious praise; when, to my eternal mortification, he turned quick upon me, brandishing the razor, and, thrusting his half-shaved face close to mine, he made such horrible mouths at me that I thought he was seized with insanity, and I was more frightened at him than my father's ghost. He exclaimed in a tone of ridicule,

'Angels, and ministers of grace, defend us!'

'Yaw, waw, waw, waw!' The abashed Prince Hamlet became sheepish, and looked more like a clown than the Grave-digger. He finished shaving, put on his wig, and with a smile of good-nature took me by the hand, and said, 'Come, young gentleman,—eh! let 's see now what we can do.' He spoke the

speech; and how he spoke it, those who have heard him never can forget."

Mr. Garrick, who at this period had retired from public life, was kindly disposed toward the young claimant of dramatic honours. For himself, he would gladly have accomplished the poetic benediction of Churchill,

> 'Take the chair;
> Nor leave it till thou place an equal there.'

With this view, he had cheerfully imparted advice and instruction to many inexperienced, and many established performers; and he viewed young Bannister with eyes of hope and kindness. With great pains he instructed him in four characters which he had himself successfully performed. If he did not judge him as yet ripe for the most exalted parts,—Hamlet, Romeo, or Benedick,—he deemed him fully equal to Zaphna, Dorilas, or Achmet. "He instructed him," Davies observes, "in Zaphna for several weeks very assiduously; and, finding the actor's abilities answer his expectations, encouraged him to make an experiment of his tragic talents in this trying part."

But it was not in Zaphna that the young actor was to make his first appearance. On the 27th of August 1778, his father took a benefit at the Haymarket, and John Bannister there first trod the boards as Dick in "The Apprentice." Arthur

Murphy, well known in all the circles of literature as a scholar, a dramatist, a poet, and a politician, had produced this farce in 1756, to repress, by timely ridicule, a passion then growing to excess among the younger branches of the commercial community; that of assembling in spouting clubs, as they were called, to recite parts of dramatic pieces, each of the young performers grasping, in expectation, fame, pleasure, and wealth, as the favourite of the town, and the admired of all beholders.

In the part of Dick all that is lively and taking in the farce is comprised; for, although the character of Old Wingate, his father,—a careful, money-making, worldly, passionate senior, fond of nothing but arithmetic, and anxious only to grasp at a good bargain and avoid a bad one,—is drawn with skill, and displays considerable humour, still it is comparatively nothing in the piece, and serves only to draw out and give additional effect to the display of the stage-struck young apothecary, his son. Woodward had been long and justly a favourite of the town; he was a player whose genius and name left an impression of his identity on many of the characters he performed, and caused the assumption of them after him to be considered a sort of trespass on land which had been appropriated, an intrusion into a circle "where none could walk but he." Mercutio, Bobadil, Marplot, and many other parts, were within my memory regarded

in this light by the old frequenters of the playhouse, and the spouting apprentice was supposed to be in the number.

As an introduction to the piece, a prologue, written by Garrick,—one of his very best,—an admirable display of grave burlesque, was spoken by Woodward. Bannister, when he undertook the character, did not shrink from the comparison; and his success in delivering these prefatory verses assured his favourable reception throughout the performance. In fact, the part appeared to be made for him.

The buoyant levity with which he encountered present inconvenience and defied menaced distress; the good-humoured pertinacity with which he adheres to his darling pursuit, evading, rather than contemning, the good advice which is showered upon him; the *naïveté* with which he recites the snatches of tragedy and comedy which are called forth by the reproaches or the persuasions of his father and his master, all seemed to show that he was peculiarly adapted to the character; and if the memory of Woodward could not be effaced, it never could be called up to the prejudice of his successor. He repeated the character on the 2nd of September, for the benefit of Mr. Jewell; and from his first appearance to his departure from the busy scene on which he shone so brightly, the part of Dick by Mr. Bannister was always joyfully hailed by the public, and more

especially as it was never announced in the bills without "the original prologue."

One of the bases on which Bannister rested his hopes of success in this character was the exercise of a talent which he possessed in great perfection,—that of mimicry. In the speeches which he had to recite, and some which he introduced on purpose, he exhibited the persons, countenances, voices, and manners of several of his contemporaries, with a faithful similarity. The practice of mimicking other performers had long been usual on the stage. I should think that if Bully Bottom was confided to Tarlton, or any other actor of wit and talent, "the raging rocks, and shivering shocks," "Thisne, Thisne," "the lion who roars that it will do any man's heart good to hear him," and "Thisby, the flower of odious savours sweet," may have been used in presenting to the laughter of the audience, by likenesses of some of the full-grown and some of the puerile performers who were at that time known to the town as representatives of dramatic heroes and heroines. But, quitting conjectures, and avoiding what might be considered a too remote historical research, it may be observed that in "L'Impromptu de Versailles," played before Louis the Fourteenth, 1663, Moliere recited speeches imitating several actors and one actress of a theatre in Paris, and with so little suspicion of giving offence, that he published the piece with the names of

the individuals he personated. Garrick, an exquisite mimic in private life, did not refrain from a display of this talent on the stage. Mr. Murphy, in his life of the great ornament of the British theatre, informs us that, in Bayes, he made frequent exhibitions of actors who were absent, and sometimes of the individuals who were on the scene with him; and portrays with great effect the manner in which Delane, Hall, and Ryan were exhibited in different passages of the burlesque tragedy. Mr. Henderson was also a great instance of skill in this art; but Boswell, anxious to prevent a misrepresentation of his hero, cautioned his readers against confiding in Henderson's imitation of Dr. Johnson: he greatly prefers Garrick, and certainly the description he gives of his reciting "Os homini sublime dedit" is irresistibly comic.

I have not mentioned Foote, Wilkinson, and many more, who appealed to the taste of the town in these living pictures; but I cannot omit offering my tribute of admiration and applause to the memory of one who seems but yesterday to have been among us,—a tribute which no man paid more largely and liberally than Bannister himself,—an acknowledgment of a versatility that knew no bounds, a felicity which afforded unceasing delight, and a fidelity which did not admit of an improvement,—in a word, to the late Charles Mathews.

But the effect produced by mimicry,—the personal imitation of the voice, the articulation, the appearance, and the gestures of individuals,—varies according to the genius and disposition of the performer. If confined to a fair display of those peculiarities from which none are exempt, without an invidious or exaggerated exhibition of mere personal or casual defects, it is pleasant to the spectator, and not offensive to the object; but if essayed merely as a mode of showing a person to his entire disadvantage, and holding him forth to scorn and ridicule, it becomes an act of cruelty, a sort of social assassination.

Speaking of Foote, who was indelicate and unsparing in his mimicry, Churchill with great judgment and feeling observes,

> "Doth a man stutter, look asquint, or halt,
> Mimics draw humour out of Nature's fault;
> With personal defects their mirth adorn,
> And hang misfortune out to public scorn.
> Even I," (he adds,) "whom Nature cast in hideous mould,
> And, having made, she trembled to behold,
> Beneath a load of mimicry may groan,
> And find that Nature's errors are my own."

In Bannister, a good heart, the sure concomitant of a correct taste, prevented all such abuse of his talent. Among those whom he exhibited when he played Dick, was Mr. Bensley, a scholar, a gentleman, and an actor of high qualifications. In Pierre, Iago, Hotspur, and in many other parts,

his fame stood eminent; but there was a peculiar glare in his eye, an occasional prominency in his gait, and a peculiar tone in his voice, easily to be imitated in a most striking manner. Fearful of injury from the ridicule which might permanently attach itself to him, if frequently displayed, he called upon the juvenile performer, and with earnest remonstrances, requested to be omitted in future; and the young actor, although conscious that he derived a large share of applause from the personation of Bensley, readily complied. The omission did not pass unnoticed; but, as the motive was easily guessed, no public observation ensued.

In subsequent performances of this part, Bannister entirely abstained from the imitation of his contemporaries.

An instance of the extent in which he possessed this power, and the delightful manner in which he exercised it in society, at a later period of his life, is given to me by a gentleman who was his early acquaintance and frequent companion.

Knowing that Garrick made faces in imitation of those by Le Brun, Bannister, at Mr. Ackermann's, exercised his talents in a display of the heads by which Lavater illustrated his system of physiognomy. With the aid of a toilet-glass, which enabled him to discern his own features, he went through a representation of many which the Swiss philosopher had

delineated, varying, heightening, and improving them as he proceeded; and, to give an appropriate conclusion, struck out from one portrait a resemblance of Garrick in Abel Drugger, reciting, in his manner, a great portion of the character.

CHAPTER III.

1778—1779.

Bannister engaged at Drury Lane. — Union of the two Companies — not popular — evident objections to it. — Bannister appears in Zaphna in Mahomet. — Observations on this tragedy as written by Voltaire — and on the English translation. — Cause why this play was never popular in England. — Riot in the Dublin Theatre on its performance. — Garrick's predilection for Mahomet. — He carefully instructs Bannister. — Mrs. Robinson acts Palmira. — Death and Funeral of Garrick. — School of Garrick, a Club. — Bannister performs Dorilas in Merope. — Observations of Voltaire on his own play, — translation by Aaron Hill. — Observations on Bannister's performance. — He plays Achmet in Barbarossa. — Similarity of this tragedy to Merope. — Comparison between the two. — Bannister in the Prince of Wales in Henry the Fourth, part the first, — and Shift in The Minor. — Observations on Bannister's first season, — his powers in Tragedy. — He plays at Birmingham, in Mattocks's Company.

At length the time arrived when, under a permanent engagement, Bannister was to display, at the great theatres, his natural qualifications, and the improvement derived from instruction.

In the season of his first regular appearance (1778-9), a curious, and not very judicious, arrangement had taken place between the two theatres

royal, termed a union, or coalition, by virtue of which the player could be transferred from one house to the other, as the exigency of the night should demand. In such a scheme, neither the respectability of the performers, nor the true interest of the managers, was consulted. It bore an aspect of shifting and occasionality which produced considerable ridicule; and it destroyed that notion of individuality and competition, on which the mind of the spectator is so often fixed, and which adds to the pleasure of witnessing a dramatic performance with that sort of party, or almost family feeling, which is so beneficial to the houses. Duncan, or the blood-bolter-ed Banquo, or the steel-clad Ghost, might escape in a hackney-coach, or walk with hurried steps, from Drury Lane, to strut and fret an hour at Covent Garden; return in time for the banquet or the closet scene in his first character; and then with equal speed bound back to be murdered, or to dance at a wedding in a fifth act, on the other stage which he had so recently quitted. It is true that the audience at each house would see him only in one part; but they could not fail to know, or help feeling some sentiments of derision at, such inconsistent versatility. Whether well-founded or not, such was the sentiment generally entertained during the progress of this experiment; it ended with the season, and never became a system.

Bannister did not first appear in Hamlet, or any other character of the home-bred English drama; but as Zaphna in "Mahomet," a tragedy, translated by the Rev. James Miller from "*Le Fanatisme, ou Mahomet le Prophéte*," of Voltaire. It was acted in Paris, in August 1742, after a licence had been for some time withheld, on account of its supposed hostility to religion; but, this scruple being overcome, it was played, at first without much success, although it afterward attained considerable favour. It possesses many of the peculiar graces of the author. The versification is flowing and natural: sentiments, bold and energetic; and, if they sometimes appear like what we now-a-days term clap-traps, still, nearly a century ago, when the French nation had not been saturated and disgusted with absurd and excessive notions of liberty and equality, some of the appeals to the feelings of the audience must have produced a striking, and, probably, permanent effect. For one example,—and many might be produced,—a speech of Omar, called in the translation Mirvan, contains many of the axioms which, fifty years afterwards, formed the basis of so many popular declamations.

"A tes viles grandeurs, ton ame accoutumée
Juge ainsi du mérite, et pèse les humains
Au poids que la fortune avoit mis dans tes mains.
Ne sais-tu pas encore, homme foible et superbe,
Que l'insect insensible enseveli sous l'herbe,

Et l'aigle impérieux, qui plane en haut du ciel,
Rentrent dans le néant aux yeux de l'Eternel ?
Les mortels sont égaux : ce n'est point la naissance,
C'est la seule vertu qui fait leur difference.
Il est de ces esprits favorisés des Cieux
Qui font tout par eux-mêmes, et rien par leurs aïeux."

From sentiments such as these, no danger was then apprehended; they fell into the description usually termed common-place: but the jealous sensibility of the catholic priesthood was alarmed at any expressions which might inspire men to think for themselves, and so the play was, like "Tartuffe," opposed and disfavoured.

In England, far from any fear being entertained for the safety of the Christian religion, a minister of the church undertook the translation, and was assisted in the task by another of the same profession, Dr. John Hoadly. The play was produced in 1744; but, although supported at all times by the most eminent performers, it never was a great favourite with the public. M. de Beaumarchais says, that Voltaire imitated, in his fourth act, Lillo's "London Merchant," where a virtuous old man, assassinated by a young one, to whom he is a relative and a benefactor, blesses and forgives him in his last moments. Such an incident, although well known, and often repeated, would have caused no distaste in a British audience; but there is a radical cause of dislike toward this tragedy which has ever prevailed, and I

trust and hope ever will prevail among us. The lovers, although they know it not, are brother and sister; and such a passion has always occasioned in our nation a feeling of disgust. Massinger's "Unnatural Combat," and Dryden and Lee's "Œdipus," although replete with poetic and dramatic beauty, could never be kept on the stage. Horace Walpole's "Mysterious Mother," imbued as it is with a very high spirit of poetry, has never been presented to an audience; and Dryden's last play, "Love Triumphant," failed probably for the same reason. Nor was "Mahomet" at all aided by the horrible circumstance, that a young man, ignorant indeed of what he was doing, and misled by the instigations of a commanding impostor, murders his own father at the foot of the altar; while his sister expiates her participation in the crime, by plunging the sword, empurpled with her parent's blood, into her own bosom.

This play, not condemned, but very slightly favoured in London, was, on account of some misapplication of political sentiments, in 1753, the cause of a violent uproar in Dublin, which ended in the demolition of the Smock Alley Theatre, and the expulsion of the elder Sheridan from the management: the particulars are not now worthy of recapitulation.

Garrick seems to have entertained a predilection

for this piece, which public opinion did not sanction. He played the part of Zaphna (Seid in the original) himself; and, unwarned by the extraordinary circumstance of mere negative success following his exertions, revived it, after a lapse of twenty years, having first carefully instructed Mr. Cautherley in his character: but the success was still feeble; it was performed only seven or eight times, and its success was not promoted by the languid powers of the gentleman who played the hero.

Unchanged in his opinion, and unwearied in his benevolence, Mr. Garrick now instructed Bannister in the part; and, it is said, followed him line by line, and word by word, with advice as to emphasis, gesture, and action. He performed Zaphna on the 11th of November 1778, with the great advantage of uniting his talents with those of the beautiful and interesting Mrs. Robinson, more known by the name of Perdita, who played Palmira. No distinct memorial of Bannister's acting on this occasion is preserved; Davies, who is the most copious on the subject, after stating the care with which Garrick formed the young dramatic candidate, his opinion of his abilities, and encouragement of his attempt, says, "The scenes of Zaphna are as interesting to the audience, as they are difficult to the powers of an actor: an inexperienced youth, naturally generous and good, is wrought upon by superstitious delusion,

and the fanatic enthusiasm of visionary zeal to act contrary to all the known dictates of reason, truth, and humanity; the knowledge of what is evidently right, clashing with what this disciple of Mahomet is taught to believe an indispensable act of religion, produces such a conflict of contending passions, such a struggle between nature and art, reason and bigotry, as nothing but the skill of a Garrick could properly discern and strongly represent. However, it must be owned that this young adventurer gave the public in Zaphna a fair promise of arriving in time to a great degree of merit: his voice as yet was not fully formed, and consequently unable always to give force to the violent passions of an enthusiast; he conceived justly and with accuracy, and sometimes executed boldly and vigorously."

The tragedy was not often repeated, nor, with the opinions already expressed of the causes of its being received with indifference, can it be matter of wonder that it was not more frequently produced. Mr. Garrick had little time to enjoy the prospect of his successful judgment on the powers of Bannister, or to complain of the bad taste of the town which would not conform to his opinion on "Mahomet." In two "little months," (January 15th, 1779,) he closed his earthly course, and the young candidate lost the benefit of an influential friend, an able instructor, and a sagacious adviser. His contemporary players

honoured his memory, not merely by sending a deputation of twelve from each house to grace his funeral, but by forming a club, called the School of Garrick, which subsisted more than thirty years after his death, and which in a future page will be more amply noticed.

Voltaire, who had afforded Bannister his first, supplied him also with his second, heroic character. On the 19th of January 1779, he played, at Drury Lane, Dorilas in "Merope," which may justly be considered a masterpiece of its author, and one of the brightest ornaments of the French drama. In a prefatory letter, or rather puff preliminary, written in the character of a Jesuit, Voltaire predicts, that whatever fate this play may experience from the versatile judgment of the Parisians, it will descend to posterity as a most perfect specimen, as a model of tragedy. He informs us of the opinion of Aristotle of the lost play of Euripides, and its high estimation among the polished Athenian judges. In a letter to the Marquis Maffei, he acknowledges the benefit he had derived from an Italian play on the subject, written by that nobleman; and that "Merope" had already been produced on the stage in London, where the action had been debased and incumbered with a ridiculous love plot.

This piece, which was performed in 1731, twelve years before the play of Voltaire, must not be con-

founded with that in which Bannister appeared. His "Merope" was a pretty close translation of the recent French tragedy, the work of Aaron Hill in 1749. This author, resenting the coarse assertion of the French poet, that no nation on earth has depicted the passion of love so unskilfully as the English, retorts with some bombast, but not without truth, on the French writers who have "deprived dramatic poetry of all that animates the passions, in pursuit of a cold, starved, tame abstinence, which, from an affectation of shunning figure, sinks into flatness; an elaborate escape from energy, into a grovelling, wearisome, bald, barren, unalarming chilliness of expression, that emasculates the mind, instead of moving it." The discernment which enabled Hill to detect these blemishes in the French writers, was not accompanied with the poetic vigour requisite to form a style exempt from the faults he exposed. His translation was well received; Garrick, in the principal character, did all that could be effected to make it striking and popular; Bannister, availing himself of his example and tuition, gained the praise of correctness, judgment, and spirit; but the play itself, sanctioned as it was by the dicta of ancient and modern criticism, was never a great favourite in England: it did not offend by horrors so egregious as those in "Mahomet," nor was there any want of poetry in the language, or of judgment in the conduct of the piece; but it did not

captivate; those who had attended it once, did not go to see it again; it had no hold on the public mind; and, consequently, all that the performer gained by the faithful and finished representation of the hero, was the applause of the present audience, the inanimate and unproductive admission of merits which excited no further interest, and created no productive curiosity.

Bannister's next character was Achmet, or Selim, in "Barbarossa," which he performed at Covent Garden on the 2d February 1779. There is great similarity in some leading incidents between this play and "Merope." In both, a usurper, who has murdered his lawful sovereign, seeks to secure his power by an enforced marriage with his faithful and implacable widow; in both, the son of the assassinated monarch, supposed also to have fallen by the agents of the tyrant, appears in disguise, and conducts the fable to a desired catastrophe; rescues his parent and punishes the traitor. Doubtless, Dr. Brown, who wrote this tragedy, was well acquainted with the work of Voltaire, but he has not crept servilely upon his steps: he has made a plot of his own, and, by judicious and effective situations, has given a lively interest to his drama, which is wanting to the original; and if, contrary to the French poet's high behest, he has added a scene of love to his plot of heroic horrors, he has so contrived it, that the feelings introduced are more

complicated than they would have been without it, while the dialogue never is made to pall through affected sweetness, or feeble prettiness. The passion is founded on an act of generous virtue on the part of the prince; and its interest is heightened by the opposed feelings of the princess, placed, in fearful balance, between her father and her lover. The poetry cannot be compared with that of Voltaire; but it rises high above that of the translation, and many passages of distinguished merit may be cited. Garrick had given popularity to the character of Selim, and the interest was well sustained by Bannister; but the zenith of "Barbarossa's" favour was gone by: approbation was all that the representative of Selim could obtain; that the new performer enjoyed, but the piece was not often repeated.

His only other attempts this season were, the Prince of Wales in the first part of "Henry the Fourth," and Shift in the "Minor," which, on the 24th of April, he played for his own benefit, Henderson and Bensley lending their assistance as Falstaff and the King. Of the Prince it is unnecessary to speak: nothing new can be said of the elegant, dissipated Hal; and, as Bannister never established in it any permanent property, his acting the part forms a fact, but not a characteristic in his history. In Shift he introduced his imitations, his father retaining the parts of Smirk and Mother Cole, which

he played after Foote's model, and in which he had obtained considerable celebrity: of this farce more notice will occur in a future page, when John Bannister took a greater range in the performance.

Thus have I conducted the young performer through his first dramatic season. All his attempts, except at his benefit, were in tragedy; in all he was well received, and the eye of expectation was favourably fixed on him. He did not rise into sudden celebrity; but at this period he was under twenty years of age. The characters assigned to him were not those of the most interesting English drama,—of Shakspeare, Otway, Southern, or Rowe: all those were already in the possession of the well-trained and well-known disciples of the school of Garrick; and Mr. Henderson was then in the early days of his theatrical career, occupying a space in public opinion which was not to be broken in upon by any new performer possessed of less than the most transcendent talents. Hastily judging from this beginning, and from his subsequent pursuits, some have pronounced that Bannister had no talents for Tragedy; but this opinion is rash and unjust. If he had continued to follow Melpomene, he would probably not have reached the pitch of fame and popularity which he afterward enjoyed; but he had powers fully sufficient to assure him, even in tragedy alone, a respectable, and, in some pieces, an eminent position. In some parts in English tragedy,

a considerable comic power is necessary, to give the author's meaning its full effect. The gentlemanly playfulness of Hamlet, the keen excruciating sarcasm of Richard, the assumed levity of Iago, and even the redundant illustration and senile garrulity of Shylock are ill represented by those who keep their faculties and their features always screwed up to the highest pitch of tragic severity.

Bannister finished his season in favour with the town, and amid the warm expectations and zealous good wishes of all who knew him. I find by his own memorandum, that in the summer he joined Mattocks's company at Birmingham. He played (and he discloses no more than the simple fact) Edgar, Lothario, George Barnwell, Macduff, Orlando, and Simon Pure.

CHAPTER IV.

1779—1780.

Drury Lane Season.—The Critic, by Mr. Sheridan,—Observations on it.—Bannister in Don Ferolo Whiskerandos.—The Critic compared with the Rehearsal.—The School of Eloquence, a farce.—Hamlet restored by Bannister—Garrick's alteration of this Tragedy.—Observations of Voltaire.—Remarks on Garrick's Alteration—Description of it by Mr. Boaden.—Success of the Restoration of Shakspeare.—Bannister's Performance.—Haymarket Season.—The Manager in Distress—its success.—Bannister plays several Characters in Tragedy—Captain Harcourt in The Chapter of Accidents.—Harlequin in The Genius of Nonsense.—Imitation of Dr. Graham.

At the commencement of the winter season, Bannister was regularly engaged at Drury Lane; and, as the ill-devised coalition had ceased, his exertions were confined to that theatre. He no longer attempted to make a firm stand in tragedy, though he did not altogether renounce that portion of the drama; but his own discernment, and that of his friends, the judgment of the manager, and the taste of the town, soon indicated a line in which he could successfully pursue emolument and fame.

In the course of the season (29th October 1779), Mr. Sheridan produced "The Critic, or A Tragedy

Rehearsed." The humour of representing a play within a play, or the rehearsal of one drama incidentally to the business of another, had long been familiar to the stage. It was tried in "The Midsummer Night's Dream;" ("The Knight of the Burning Pestle," may not, perhaps, be considered a rehearsal;) and many other plays, from the days of Elizabeth down to those of Henry Fielding, who attempted it, without much spirit or success, in "The Authors' Farce," and in "Pasquin." But "The Critic" cannot be mentioned without bringing to mind the Duke of Buckingham's "Rehearsal." The observation of Dr. Johnson, that the satire on Dryden "had not salt enough to keep it sweet," cannot be applied to the production of the more modern writer: to use the words of Mr. Bayes, it is, throughout the first act, a mere prize of wit,—"snip-snap, hit for hit, and dash." The exhibition of playhouse patrons, enterprising critics, a too sensitive author, and a manufacturer of newspaper puffs, keeps the audience, not in a roar of laughter, but in that more effective display of admiration—a mute attention, followed by a hearty expression of mirthful enjoyment. Sneer and Dangle, Sir Fretful Plagiary and Mr. Puff, in their own persons, and by their descriptions and allusions to passing transactions and permanent events in the literary, dramatic, social, and political world, afford no respite to the mind from a series of pleasurable

sensations. In the second act, the rehearsal of a mock-tragedy is introduced, and here the author's embarrassments begin. Sheridan enters upon the ground occupied by the Duke of Buckingham, whose play was not then, as it is now, in a state of profound dramatic repose, but continually before the public, animated by the genius of Garrick and other eminent performers. Dryden said of this play, that the author, if he meant to delineate him in the person of Bayes, could have no objection to acknowledge, that himself, and other men of wit and pleasure about town, were represented by Johnson and Smith, "and certainly," he said, "two tamer walking gentlemen never before appeared on the boards." If this description does not, in all particulars, apply to the parties who attend Mr. Puff's tragedy, still their situation is sufficiently awkward to prevent any display of brilliant intellect or powerful conversation. It is a great embarrassment to this portion of the piece, that a man so well versed in the town and its entertainments, and so well acquainted with all the avenues to fame as Mr. Puff, should be the father of such a performance. It might much more naturally have been expected that Sir Fretful Plagiary should be the author; but, as that character was a personal representation of a well-known living dramatist, it was not prudent to continue him on the stage after the single scene in which his foibles are so well exhibited.

Dryden was too general and too frequent a subject of conversation to weary the audience in any number of scenes; but Mr. Cumberland, whose character was known only by his personal virtues, his moral writings, and a few dull lines in a numerous series of successful dramatic productions, would have palled the general audience, and probably excited some indignation in those who were acquainted with that learned and respectable, although whimsical, gentleman, whose peculiarities, if tolerated, or even applauded in a single scene, would not have been endured as the subject of ridicule for a longer period. By the exhibition which was made of him, his feelings, naturally irritable, were severely wounded. Sneer and Dangle do not give life to the dialogue by any vivacity or wit of their own; but for success, the rehearsal part of "The Critic" rested on the droll points of the mock-tragedy itself, (many of which are become almost proverbial,) the charm of the scenery, and the great ability of the performers.

Miss Pope as Tilburina, the unhappy heroine, can never be forgotten by those who saw her, or adequately conceived by those who did not. Her efforts were fully supported by Bannister in Don Ferolo Whiskerandos, a noble Spanish prisoner who had become her lover. His part is short, but it has showy points, and whimsical situations, calculated for effect, and he made them most effective. In drawing them

out, the skill and talent of Bannister were eminently useful. The senseless rant in which he expresses his love, the absurd circumstances of the dagger scene with the two uncles and the two nieces, received from him all the aid which a thorough conception of the author's design could enable an actor of taste and judgment to bestow. The conclusion of his part, where he is slain in single combat by the Captain of a privateer disguised as a beefeater was carried to the extreme point of humorous burlesque. His elegant and skilful fencing, his convulsive and passionate death, and his refusal to "stay, dying there all night," when requested by the author to repeat the passage, left impressions on the audience, which a character so short and insignificant in other hands must have failed to produce. In short, he rendered Don Whiskerandos eminently a favourite with the public so long as he continued to be represented by the actor by whom he was first embodied. On one occasion Bannister played Sir Fretful Plagiary; it was for his own benefit, at Drury Lane, in 1795: but there is no reason to wonder that he did not repeat the experiment. The part was not suited to his genius, but peculiarly so to that of Parsons and of Mathews.

I have heard Mr. Holcroft say, that he could make a key to "The Critic" similar to that which is published with "The Rehearsal," by selecting from

the works of contemporary tragic writers, passages and lines exactly similar to those in the burlesque drama. If that were so, it must be evident that Sheridan had materials to work upon far inferior to those which came into the hands of Buckingham, or, that he used them with less ability. There are good scenes in "The Critic," but nothing to compare with the quarrel between Prince Prettyman and Prince Volscius, because they are not in love with the same woman; the puzzling speech of Volscius, "How strange a creature am I grown of late!" the furious rants of Drawcansir; or the circumstances which attend the revolution and counter-revolution at Brentford. The mute Lord Burleigh, with his mystical shake of the head, rises little above Shirley, whose character had been under-written to set off the rest, but, the beef-eater observed, is not at all better than Amaryllis interrupted. The great actors who performed Bayes generally contrived to introduce some sarcastic or pleasant extempore allusion to passing events. Cibber tells us, in his letter to Pope, that he first drew upon himself the hostility of the irritable poet by a fling, as he calls it, at the unfortunate "Three Hours after Marriage," added to the part he was playing. Garrick used the same liberty with never-failing effect; and Henderson, the last time he played Bayes, introduced a very popular hit at the Cardinal de Rohan's forgery of the Queen's name in

the affair of the necklace. "The Critic" has not been used for similar purposes.

It may be just worth while to mention, that on the 4th April 1780, in this season, Bannister played, for Brereton's benefit, a part, for which I can find no name, in a farce called "The School of Eloquence," produced in ridicule of the debating societies which were rapidly increasing in the metropolis. The object was hardly worth the effort. Foote had achieved, in "The Orators," all that could well be attained: the gross mass of presumption, ignorance, and pertness, which formed the substance of the commodity of these warehouses, was beneath the aim of the satirist; while the exertions of some who made there their early essays, and afterward rose to the most eminent stations in the law and the senate, were above reproach. This piece has been confidently, although without any adequate reason, attributed to Mrs. Cowley, but it does not appear in her works; and the collector of them, her son, a barrister, affirms, in his preface, that "'Who's the Dupe?' is the only instance in which she descended to farce."

In this season, Bannister conferred on the public a favour, for which he was entitled to no small portion of gratitude; he restored "Hamlet" in its original form. Awed by the overbearing positiveness, or seduced by the flippant reasoning of Voltaire, Garrick had altered this sterling English drama, by omitting

many scenes and circumstances, and totally changing the manner and causes of the catastrophe. The French poet having written "Semiramis" in 1748, and introduced a ghost, thought it necessary to overcome the prejudices of his countrymen, or to conciliate their favour toward this innovation, by a laborious dissertation on ancient and modern Tragedy. As this essay was addressed to Cardinal Quirini, a Venetian nobleman, he thought it necessary to mention the revival of the highest species of the drama in Italy, under Leo the Tenth, and to compliment the nation which had introduced music into modern Tragedy, even although he admits some deduction on account of those little detached airs and ariettes which interrupt the action to display the graces of an emasculate, but brilliant voice, at the expense of dramatic interest and sound sense. In comparing the French with the Greek theatre, he gives his own country the preference; but, with characteristic moderation, he qualifies an assertion which might otherwise be deemed too arrogant: "I do not pretend," he says, "that, in all particulars, the French Drama excels the Greek, and should drive it into oblivion. Inventors always occupy the first place in our memory; but, whatever respect we may entertain for men of original genius, we cannot look on their followers without frequently feeling greater pleasure. We respect Homer, but we read Tasso, and ever find in

him many beauties of which Homer had no conception. We admire Sophocles; but how many of our good tragic authors possess master-strokes of genius, which, had he lived after them, Sophocles would have been proud to imitate!"

Disposing thus of the ancient and the two modern continental stages, he proceeds to his own piece, and, as an apology for introducing the ghost of Ninus, refers to the tragedy of "Hamlet." "The Romans," he says, "did not believe in ghosts, and yet, in 'The Pharsalia,' one is evoked by Pompey. The English are equally incredulous on this subject, and yet they every day witness in the tragedy of 'Hamlet' the shade of a departed king, appearing on the stage for a purpose very similar to that on which I have produced the spectre of Ninus. Yet I am certainly very far from justifying, in all particulars, the tragedy of 'Hamlet;' it is a gross and barbarous piece, which would not be endured by the most vile populace of France or Italy. Hamlet goes mad in the second act, his mistress in the third; the prince murders her father under pretence of killing a rat, and the heroine casts herself into the river. A grave is dug upon the stage; the grave-diggers make quibbles worthy of them, holding in their hands dead men's skulls. Hamlet replies to their abominable grossnesses, by absurdities not less disgusting. During this transaction one of the actors conquers Poland. Hamlet,

his mother, and his father-in-law drink together on the stage; songs are sung at table, they quarrel, they fight, they kill one another. One would think this work the production of a drunken savage."

That Voltaire was very imperfectly acquainted with the English language, is evident to all who peruse his works; that in matters where his own country was to come into comparison, he wanted justice, moderation, and candour, all must own who have considered his character; but this gross, illiberal scurrility, unsustained by fact, unfounded in almost all its particulars, can only be accounted for on one principle. He was stealing from Shakspeare one of his most impressive creations; and he followed the rule, so often resorted to, of abusing and maltreating those who are to be the objects of plunder. Does Shakspeare want an avenger?—he will find one in every man who will place the ghosts of Hamlet and Ninus side by side, and compare the dignity, the interest, the pathos, the clear, satisfactory, and appalling disclosure of the Danish spirit, with the puerile parade, the unsatisfactory injunction, and the fustian riddle of the Babylonian.

Before criticism such as this, the genius of Garrick could stoop so low as to disfigure a play in which he had achieved a high reputation. He acknowledged in a letter to Sir William Young, dated 10th January 1773, which was communicated to

Mr. Thomas Dibdin, and published in his "Reminiscences," that his producing "Hamlet" with alterations was the most impudent thing he ever did; but, he says, he had sworn he would not leave the stage until he had rescued that noble play from all the rubbish of the fifth act. "The alteration," he says, "was received with general approbation, beyond my most vain expectations." I think that, in this, Garrick deceived himself: I am not old enough to remember the theatre between 1773 and 1776; but I have conversed with many competent judges, friends and admirers of Roscius too, who pronounced his alteration to be most "weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable." Of his two biographers, Tom Davies says not a word about it, further than by placing it in the list of his works, with the observation that it was not printed; and Murphy speaks of it with unqualified censure, adding the pithy and just remark, that, as he never printed his alterations, it seems he saw his error.

Pursuing this notion, some writers have said that no copy of the altered tragedy exists, and they even have asserted that it was buried with Garrick. But Mr. Boaden, more fortunate in his research, found in the library of the late Mr. Kemble the very copy, received as a present from Mrs. Garrick; and, in his biography of that truly eminent and memorable man, gives the following description of the alteration:—

" He cut out the voyage to England, and the execution of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, ' who had made love to the employment, and marshalled his way to knavery.' He omitted the funeral of Ophelia, and all the wisdom of the prince, and the rude jocularity of the grave-diggers. Hamlet bursts in upon the king and his court, and Laertes reproaches him with his father's and his sister's deaths. The exasperation of both is at its height when the king interposes; he had commanded Hamlet to depart for England, and declares that he will no longer bear this rebellious conduct, but that his wrath shall at length fall heavy on the prince. ' First,' exclaims Hamlet, ' feel you mine!' and he instantly stabs him. The queen rushes out, imploring the attendants to save her from her son; Laertes, seeing treason and murder, attacks Hamlet, to revenge his father, his sister, and his king; he wounds Hamlet mortally, and Horatio is on the point of making Laertes accompany him to the shades, when the prince commands him to desist, assuring him that it was the hand of Heaven which administered by Laertes ' that precious balm for all his wounds.' We then learn that the miserable mother had dropped in a trance ere she could reach her chamber-door, and Hamlet implores for her ' an hour of penitence ere madness end her.' He then joins the hands of Laertes and Horatio, and commands them to unite their virtues (as a

coalition of ministers) to 'calm the troubled land.' The old couplet as to the bodies concludes the play. All this is written in a mean and trashy, commonplace manner; and, in a word, sullied the page of Shakspeare, and disgraced the taste and judgment of Mr. Garrick."

If the plays of Shakspeare were to be judged by the rules of more modern composition, his fifth act of "Hamlet" might be condemned as an unhappy effort; and one circumstance in it,—the change of the foils in the fencing match,—is certainly too flimsy and puerile to be defended: but on the whole, considering how wide and complicated is the plot, how many the crimes and errors to be atoned for, it cannot be said that poetic justice has not been well administered. The murderous and adulterous king is slain in the very moment, and by the very means, which he had selected for the consummation of his villanies; his paramour, if less guilty, yet far from innocent, falls also by his contrivance; Laertes, who in so base a manner had permitted himself to be implicated as agent in a cowardly plot, is, as he says himself, justly killed with his own treachery; Hamlet, although innocent and virtuous, could not, for any purpose consistent with the notions of pure happiness which poetry, as its highest moral, bestows only on the good, be reserved for such a state after the slaying of Polonius and the fate of Ophelia. For such

vile, creeping wretches as Rosencrantz and Guildenstern no feeling can be entertained; however justly merited, we do not even condescend to rejoice at their destruction.

Garrick, it is said, performed his altered play to the very last period of his appearance; but, on the 21st of April 1780, the town had the satisfaction of seeing the scenes in which they had delighted restored. On all material points, the opinion of the critics accorded with that of the manager. But the grave-diggers! The re-introduction of the grave-diggers was one of the points on which the critic would most plausibly descant; armed in the authority of Voltaire, and appealing, in choice terms of common-place, to notions of the solemn propriety which ought to prevail in tragedy, he might make a formidable show. Plays must be judged with some reference to the manners of the times in which they are produced. Had Addison, Rowe, or Murphy introduced a scene of the same kind into "Cato," "The Fair Penitent," or "The Grecian Daughter," the audience would no doubt have made them rue their presumption; but the scene in "Hamlet," and those of similar description in the other tragedies of Shakspeare, had acquired a firm hold on the public mind, and were, with a great portion of the audience, expected with hope and witnessed with pleasure.

Bannister performed the tragedy, thus revivified,

for his own benefit. However inferior to his great master he may have shown himself in the personation of the young prince, his taste and judgment at least received the warm sanction of the public, for Garrick's alteration was never asked for again. It is not to be assumed that Bannister's Hamlet did not possess a high degree of merit; it was well received, and repeated several times with great applause. But Henderson was in possession of the part at Covent Garden, and Kemble soon came to appropriate it at Drury Lane.

Twenty-four years after this revival, Bannister had a characteristic hint on the subject from Waldron, an enthusiastic admirer of the deceased Roscius. Talking of him one night in the green-room at the Haymarket, Bannister said, "Do you know, Waldron, who first restored the scene of the grave-diggers, and played Hamlet on the occasion? It was I."

"Yes," Waldron answered, "and you ought to have known better; had Garrick been alive, he would have been angry with you: and I'll tell you what,—When you go to heaven, Bannister, and see Garrick, his first expression will be, 'I am very glad to see you, Jack!—but why did you restore the scene of the grave-diggers?'"

At the close of the winter season, Bannister accepted from Mr. Colman an engagement at the Haymarket theatre, where he was actively employed, and

greatly advanced his reputation. On the 30th of May the house opened with a prelude by the proprietor, called "The Manager in Distress." The following is a brief account of its business:—The manager and a friend are discovered in the prompter's parlour, where they are informed that the patentees of Drury Lane and Covent Garden intend to deprive the manager of the Haymarket of his performers—a letter from Parsons is read, he declines an engagement on account of his health—four actresses say that they are determined to give up the theatre for the schools of eloquence—the manager directs the prompter to return the money and to make an apology to the audience—the prompter begins his address—an Irishman makes a speech from the pit, a lady from the balcony—Bannister, jun. speaks from the opposite balcony, and then gives his imitations—a woman enters with the call-paper, she says that Palmer and the rest are dressed and sitting in the green-room—the prompter concludes the prelude by announcing the performances of the present, and some ensuing evenings. The idea of making some of the performers appear as a portion of the audience was not without a precedent, nor has it been overlooked as a model: occasionally used, it produces a pleasing surprise; but the ingenuity and success of the contrivance have never been so complete as in Colman's prelude. Egan's Irishman, Mrs. Webb's declaiming lady from

the debating society, and Bannister's imitations, were all received with animated applause: the piece was repeated during the season, and frequently revived.

In the course of this summer, Bannister attempted several tragic characters; Douglas, Philotas in "The Grecian Daughter," Hippolitus in "Phædra and Hippolitus," and Raymond in "The Countess of Salisbury." None of these attempts could be termed a failure; but as he was not conspicuous in any, and as his fame was not derived from them, a particular notice of them is unnecessary.

He performed, also, Captain Harcourt in "The Chapter of Accidents," a part in all respects unworthy of him; but his position at the time is accurately and justly described by his friend, George Colman the younger, in his "Random Records:" "He enacted the insipid part of Captain Harcourt, whereby he suffered the fate (not very uncommon for an actor who, before he is of age, begins his profession in London,) of truckling to a drudgery very much below his innate excellence: but his abilities were then in the bud, and his line undecided; so he took, for the convenience of the theatre, any line, good, bad, or indifferent, either in tragedy, comedy, or farce; no trifling proof of his versatility." For his own benefit, he played Hamlet, as he had at Drury Lane.

But the greatest, and, to him, most marked event of the season, was the production of a pantomime by the

elder Colman, called "The Genius of Nonsense," or, as the wits paraphrased it, "The Nonsense of Genius." Harlequin was not in this, as in so many other pantomimes, reduced to dumbness; he spoke with as much vivacity as he moved; and the young actor showed both his judgment and agility to advantage. Colman pressed into this piece an anecdote of a person applying, by advertisement, for an agreeable companion in a post-chaise, and finding that the person who obtains the place has no quality which entitles him to it, except the answer, ever ready, and returned to every proposition, "I'm very agreeable." "Shall we stop at this inn?"—"I'm very agreeable." "Shall we order dinner?"—"I'm very agreeable." On this delightful associate, Harlequin played off a trick from "L'Enragé," a little farce which Texier was then reading to the public with great applause. Being seated at table, with a very scanty allowance of provisions, Harlequin, by signs, shows his agreeable companion that a fit of canine madness is coming on him. In the intervals between his snarlings and barkings, he informs his terrified fellow-traveller, that some time ago he had been bitten by a mad (bow-wow-wow) dog; but, notwithstanding every possible assurance that there is no danger, the agreeable gentleman is scared from participating in the short commons; and, like the victim of jocular persecution in the tale of "Monsieur Tonson," "he runs away, and ne'er is heard

of more." In this pantomime, Harlequin transformed himself into a celebrated empiric of the day, called Dr. Graham. The individual thus exposed to merited ridicule, had taken a house in Pall Mall, which he called the "Temple of Health." He adorned it in a gaudy style, with looking-glass panels and crystal chandeliers; he lectured on electricity, and, in illustration of its influence, he equipped a state bed, isolated by means of glass pillars, boasting much of its efficacy. As decency would necessarily shun such an abode, the lecturer soon levelled his discourse to the taste of the only audience he could hope for, and finally permitted the introduction of E. O. tables, which rendered the Temple of Health, as he called it, a public nuisance, and justified the intervention of the police, headed by Sir Samson Wright, an active and spirited magistrate of Bow Street. Before the Doctor and his Temple had reached this abject point of degradation, Bannister, to the great delight of the public, presented him to view, with all his natural, acquired, and affected manners, accurately portrayed.

CHAPTER V.

1780—1781—1782.

Drury Lane.—Bannister plays Hamlet—The Apprentice—Hyllus in The Royal Suppliants, by Dr. Delap—Oronoko—Dr. Quintessence in Dissipation—Captain Harcourt—Buck, in The Englishman in Paris.—Haymarket.—Plays Cape in The Author—Dactyl in The Patron—Characters in Tom Thumb.—Separate scenes performed at benefits—he appears in two.—The Young Actor.—The Beggar's Opera Metamorphosed—Prelude—Principal Disguises—Wilson in Mrs. Peachum—Edwin in Lucy—Charles Bannister in Polly—Mrs. Cargill in Macheath—Mrs. Kennedy—Mrs. Wilson in Filch.—Success of the Burlesque.—Observations on the Opera.—Drury Lane—Season 1781—1782.—The Carnival of Venice.—Variety, a Comedy.—Haymarket.—Fatal Curiosity—Its great merit and success.—Bannister in Posthumus.—Edwards in The East Indian.—Life and Death of Common Sense.—Bannister in Fustian.—The Maid of the Oaks.—Bannister's Sir Harry Groveby.

In the following season, at Drury Lane, Bannister did not make any great addition to the list of his characters, although he made progress in his profession, and in public estimation. The house opened, on the 10th September 1780, with the re-integrated "Hamlet," in which he performed the hero. The "Apprentice" was also revived, after a lapse of fourteen years, and he added to his celebrity in Dick.

Dr. Delap brought forward a cold, tame, and ill-digested tragedy, called "The Royal Suppliant." It is founded on events supposed to have followed the death of Hercules; but, although Euripides might form from them a play calculated to gratify the people of Athens, the gods of the mythology do not possess, among us, sufficient interest to make a masque or a ballet of action popular, except in burlesque. But the learned Doctor travelled entirely away from the story of Euripides, and the fable which he substituted possesses no charm which could engage attention. A part called Hyllus was assigned to Bannister; he is an Athenian soldier in disguise, and kills Eurystheus. After a lingering life, protracted to nine nights, this tragedy expired, and no attempt at reviving it has ever been made.

On the 17th May 1781, Bannister added to the list of his tragic characters Oroonoko, but with no conspicuous success.

Miles Peter Andrews, a lively, shallow, but sometimes successful writer, supplied, on the 12th of March, a comedy, called "Dissipation," in which Bannister, with much ability, played the part of Doctor Quintessence. The piece was represented twelve times, and closed the season.

He selected for his benefit (8th May) Miss Lee's "Chapter of Accidents," sustaining the character of Captain Harcourt, which he had performed on its first

appearance at the Haymarket, during the last season. How unworthy this part was of his powers has already been mentioned; but the general cast of the play was so effective, and its hold upon the public so strong, that it could not fail of being productive. The author of this spirited, well-conducted, and moral drama, was the daughter of an actor; and the reception of it adds one to the many instances which disprove the infallibility of managers. Mr. Harris refused it in a manner which drew on him reproaches, more than usually acrimonious, from the fair author. Its success did not speedily tempt her to a new dramatic essay; but her mortification must have been soothed, and her pride gratified, when she found that the piece which had been so sternly rejected was, under the management of the same Mr. Harris, frequently performed—indeed, a stock-piece—at Covent Garden.

As an afterpiece, he revived, after ten years' interval, Foote's "Englishman in Paris," a gross and witless production, which no power of acting could, in these days, render endurable. Buck, the Englishman, is a coarse, ignorant, obstreperous clown, of whom modern manners cannot furnish a specimen; and in the times in which this farce was produced (1753), Mr. Buck's frolic at the play-house would have sent him, if not to the Bastile, at least to Bicêtre. It was, however, favourably received: Macklin first, and then Foote, played the principal

character; Bannister sustained it with equal skill, and his buoyant good-humour and easy vivacity softened down, in some degree, the brutal violence of the original.

At the Haymarket, Bannister increased the list of his characters without adding to his renown; but public opinion was already pronounced in his favour, practice improved his talents, and his frequent appearance always kept him advantageously in memory. On the night of opening, he played Cape, the poet, in Foote's farce of "The Author," a lively, spirited character, affording display of whimsical situations and generous sentiments; but, although the interest of the piece turns on him, the applause was all carried away by Mr. and Mrs. Cadwallader, represented by his father, the successor and almost the rival of Foote, and Mrs. Wells, who by her admirable simplicity, her well-feigned folly, not only embellished the part, but gained for the rest of her life the nick-name of Becky. It were now a waste of time to repeat the well-known anecdote of Foote's having consecrated to permanent ridicule, in the character of Cadwallader, a worthy Welsh baronet from whom he had received hospitality and favours; but it is not so well known that the idea of the robustious husband and his very silly wife is derived from Dryden's unsuccessful and long-forgotten comedy of "Limberham."

In " The Patron," another farce of Foote's, which was awakened (1st of August) after a sleep of seven years, Bannister performed Dactyl, a poor author : it afforded him a good scolding scene with an overbearing bookseller, and then sunk him into one of those *buveurs d'eau chaude,* who, for the sake of tea and buttered muffins, listen to the twaddle and applaud the frivolities of a conceited man of wealth, who fancies that by such gifts and such displays he can rival Mæcenas.

In " The English Merchant," a comedy by the elder Colman, Lord Falbridge, which the son of the author calls a deadly-lively character, was allotted to Bannister. " There was a very persevering sky-coloured suit of laced clothes," he says, " which was always lugged out of the Haymarket wardrobe for him upon such occasions; and Jack Bannister in his light-blue and silver, with a sword by his side, was, to all play-goers at that time, as infallible a token of a clever young actor in a bad part, as deep mourning is the sign of death in a family."

He also played Noodle, or Doodle, in " Tom Thumb;" the printed authority gives the one, his manuscript memorandum the other, so I am not sure which, — *mais n'importe.* At another period, he performed King Arthur.

It was at that time a custom to present, at benefits, scenes from various plays of Shakspeare, making an

unconnected medley, giving no clear and distinct dramatic interest, but forming an uncohesive miscellany, in which players exhibited themselves in specimens or sippets of characters. For Digges's benefit he appeared in the closet scene of "Hamlet;" and for his own benefit a similar entertainment was offered, in which he appeared as Romeo in the tomb scene. Instead of a fifth act, was given a sketch, called the Young Actor, in which he and his father vied in their powers of mimicry.

But the paramount whim, the captivating absurdity of the season, was "The Beggar's Opera," with all the characters metamorphosed; men being substituted for women, and women for men. This folly was introduced by a prelude written with considerable humour, in which Bannister played the prompter, and prepared the way for the follies which were to ensue, by a grave apology for a delay in beginning the performance, as Polly was only half shaved.

The most striking travesties were Mrs. Cargill in Macheath, Mrs. Webb in Lockit, and Mrs. Wilson in Filch; Mr. Bannister, the father, in Polly, Edwin in Lucy, Jack Bannister in Jenny Diver, and Dick Wilson in Mrs. Peachum. We have with pleasure seen ladies perform male characters; the plots of many of our comedies, from "Twelfth Night" downward, turn upon the circumstance; and from the

days of Mrs. Woffington to those of Mrs. Jordan, Sir Harry Wildair has been played by ladies: but the contrary disguise, even to carry on during one scene a particular part of the plot, has been generally viewed with impatience and distaste. A few exceptions occur; but there the females are so masculine, that, if women were to perform them, the metamorphosis would almost be petitioned for: take, as an instance, Moll Flaggon in "The Lord of the Manor." Could a woman be tolerated in it, if Liston were engaged at the house?

In "The Beggar's Opera," the extraordinary merit or the extreme whimsicality of the performance reconciled the audience even to this portion of its impropriety. Wilson's vulgarity in Mrs. Peachum was often ludicrous and effective, but if Sir Hugh Evans was shocked at the old woman who had a "peard under her muffler," the spectators of "The Beggar's Opera" had much more right to be so, when Mrs. Peachum, holding her dress a little awkwardly, or swinging too heedlessly in her chair, let them perceive a pair of black plush breeches under her petticoats. They were not so much offended when Charles Bannister, managing his dress too carelessly, showed an ankle which, for its elegance, the fairest lady present might have wished her own.

Edwin's Lucy was every thing that a low virago, transplanted from the bar of a dram-shop to the high

office of an inferior turnkey at Newgate, could be expected to display. Her ludicrous grief, her vulgar rage, her nauseous fondness, and her petulant vituperation, were delineated even beyond the life. Those who witnessed it cannot easily forget the tone and spirit which he infused into the songs "Thus, when a good housewife sees a rat," and "I'm bubbled, I'm bubbled." The line, "These fingers, with pleasure, could fasten the noose," was given with a most unfeminine energy. In the mock female characters, the great achievement was Charles Bannister's Polly. Sir Joshua Reynolds has observed, that, whatever horrors an artist may intend to display, his picture should always represent some individual, or some object, in which the eye could delight for its beauty. Gay seems to have anticipated this idea, in placing the gentle, confiding, affectionate Polly Peachum in the midst of his crew of dissolute ruffians and worthless strumpets. Had Charles Bannister, with his ample, muscular, manly frame, and deep intonation both in speaking and singing, attempted to mince in his gait, or to "aggravate his voice" into any feminine softness, the effect would, however successful for a moment, in the end have become tiresome and disgusting. The public had been used to witness his imitation of the Soprano of Tenducci; and his Arionelli, a similar personage, in "The Son-in-law:" but they

were short, and produced an effect very different from that which would have attended a repetition during three long acts. He appeared overloaded, but not encumbered, by a complete dress of white muslin, with a hoop, and a middle which appeared tightly laced; and however inconsistent his large size, a certain trick of his countenance, and his manly step, might be with the delicacy of a young female, no antics, or superadded drolleries of his own, drew down the senseless laugh, so often a tribute to mere grossness and absurdity. His "big manly voice" alone produced a sufficient comic effect: his Caliban roar when Peachum pinches his daughter to make her confess, in the press-yard fashion, "by squeezing an answer from her;" and the deep intonation of her kindness when she recommends a *repetatur haustus* from the gin-bottle—"Give her another glass, sir; my mamma drinks double quantity whenever she is out of order," would have drawn a hearty laugh from the sourest misanthrope. The songs, whether tender or spirited, were given with the utmost taste and judgment; and as much applause as could possibly be bestowed on an attempt of the kind, was readily given to Polly's male representative.

To the ladies in the travestie no less praise may be assigned. Mrs. Cargill's small and unencumbered figure made her a ludicrous contrast to Bannister,

who, when singing the line "Fondly let me loll," hardly knew on what part of her diminutive person to accommodate himself: yet the sweetness and spirit with which she gave the songs more than reconciled, it captivated the public. After her, Mrs. Kennedy played the hero of the highway; and that not in the disguised opera only, but when the other characters were restored to their proper sexes: the unrivalled tones of her exquisite voice made the audience forget that nature had denied her every advantage of face and form; her beautiful expression of the original songs, such as "My heart was so free," and "The charge is prepared," made an impression which was only exceeded when she gave the gratuitous hunting-song, "The Dusky Night."

Mrs. Webb showed much ability in Lockit; she was superior to Mrs. Lefevre in Peachum, and their quarrel produced much amusement: but Mrs. Wilson, the arch, comical little creature, nick-named, from the colour of her locks, the Goldfinch, presented in Filch the perfect personification of a handy, expert pick-pocket, and the genuine manners of a well-plumed Newgate bird. So complete was the representation, that I remember hearing a lady remark that, if she saw such a fellow near her in the street, she should not require the admonition of a Bow-street officer to "take care of her pockets."—Ladies wore pockets in those days.

Many and just are the objections which may be advanced against such transformations pervading a whole play; but just objections do not form the rule, or limit the extent of public approbation. In the brief season of the Haymarket, the piece was thus played eighteen times, the house opened with it in the following year; and, as most of the performers belonged to the Covent Garden company, it was sometimes performed at that theatre. It has not, of late years, been revived in this form: indeed, the opera itself, that beautiful collection of the true English ballad, of exquisite wit, of pungent satire, and of coarse, but correct, displays of life and manners, has withered under the scorching sirocco of fastidious criticism and overstrained morality. Our discriminating age rejects the coarse freedom of Macheath and his male and female associates, for the refined intrigue of Le Mariage de Figaro: the highwayman and his seraglio are declared scandalous, in spite of Gay and Swift; while Don Giovanni and his "*mille e tre*" are the unreproved delight of theatres and of families.

At Drury Lane, in the following season (1781-2), Bannister did not often appear. The course of the theatre kept in other hands many parts in which he afterward showed himself to great advantage; and the only new characters which he performed were in "The Carnival of Venice," an opera said to be by

Tickell, and "Variety," a comedy. As the opera was never printed, but the songs alone, and as Bannister had not yet adventured to sing, the name of his part does not appear. In the comedy his name was Steady; it was played nine nights; the current criticism upon it said that it is uniformly dull, and by whom it was written is not clear.

Soon after the opening of the Haymarket Theatre, Colman revived, on the 26th of June 1782, after an interval of fifty years, as he advertised, although in fact it was only forty-six, Lillo's tragedy of "Fatal Curiosity." This play seizes on the feelings with irresistible power. Its plot, conduct, and character are described with great force, and exquisitely just criticism, by the deservedly celebrated Mr. Harris, of Salisbury, the author of "Hermes." "A long-lost son, returning home unexpectedly, finds his parents alive, but perishing with indigence. The young man, whom, from his long absence, his parents never expected, reveals himself first to an amiable friend, his long-loved Charlotte, and with her concerts the manner how to discover himself to his parents. It is agreed he should go to their house, and there remain unknown, till Charlotte should arrive and make the happy disclosure. He goes thither accordingly; and having, by a letter of Charlotte's, been admitted, converses unknown both with father and mother, and beholds their misery with filial affec-

tion; complains at length of fatigue, and begs he may be admitted for a while to repose. Retiring, he delivers a casket to his mother, and tells her it is a deposit she must guard till he awakes. Curiosity tempts her to open the casket, and she is dazzled by the splendour of innumerable jewels. Objects so alluring suggest bad ideas, and poverty soon gives to those ideas a sanction. Black as they are, she communicates them to her husband, who, at first reluctant, is at length persuaded, and, for the sake of the jewels, stabs the stranger while he is asleep. The fatal murder is perpetrating, or but barely perpetrated, when Charlotte arrives, full of joy, to inform them that the stranger within their walls was their long-lost son. What a discovery!—What a revolution!—How irresistibly are the tragic passions of terror and pity excited! It is no small praise to this affecting fable, that it so much resembles that of the 'Œdipus Tyrannus.' In both tragedies, that which apparently leads to joy, conducts in its completion to misery; both concur in the horror of their discoveries; and each in those great outlines of a truly tragic revolution where, according to the nervous sentiment of Lillo himself, we see

> 'The two extremes of life,
> The highest happiness and deepest woe,
> With all the sharp and bitter aggravations
> Of such a vast transition.'"

In this revival, Bannister performed the part of Randall, not a leading one in the drama; but, from the genuine honesty, the unshaken fidelity, and the warm affection it displays, admirably adapted to his powers. It was played with great success; Mr. Bensley in the father, and Palmer in the son, rivetted the attention of the audience; but the exclamation of the young man while the father was striking the dagger to his heart, was so appalling, that after the first night it was discontinued.

For his benefit (August 9th), Bannister attempted Posthumus, but was not encouraged by success to renew the experiment.

He played also some minor parts in comedy and farce, and the hero, named Edmonds, in "The East Indian," which lived only the chartered life of an indifferent drama, not bad enough to be damned, nor good enough to grow into firm maturity,—nine nights. For Wilson's benefit, a part of Fielding's "Pasquin" was produced, under the title of "A tragical Tragedy, called the Life and Death of Common Sense." Bannister filled the part of Fustian, an author superintending the rehearsal of a silly, burlesque compilation of bombast, supposed to be intended for a tragedy. If, when Fielding wrote, there was, in this satire, anything peculiarly applicable to the times, those times were so changed, that no efforts of performers could nurse the piece even into

a temporary popularity. Its whole scope is given by the author in a few words: "If Common Sense reigned over the world, priests would be more modest, lawyers more honest, laws more equal and simple, and physicians more able and less mystical, tragedy would be less turgid and affected, and comedy would not be superseded by dancers, tumblers, fools, and Harlequin." All this is very true, very trite, and very tame.

Mrs. Bulkeley had, for her benefit, General Burgoyne's dramatic entertainment, as he termed it, "The Maid of the Oaks." The Earl of Derby, on his marriage with Lady Betty Hamilton, gave at his seat, called the Oaks, in Kent, a *fête champetre* of several days' duration. The General, who was allied to him by marriage, formed from the scene this drama, which is not deficient in whim, wit, or contrivance. It was originally in five acts, with songs and a masque; but afterward reduced to a very clever afterpiece. Bannister performed Sir Harry Groveby, a well-mannered and warm-hearted gentleman; he has engaged himself to marry, without consulting his uncle, a whimsical but benevolent humorist, who being introduced, unexpectedly and unknown to the object of his nephew's affections, is so captivated, that the road to his assent is smooth and easy, his liberality free and ample. The part of Sir Harry admits only of a graceful, animated, and feeling display, and Bannister gave it in perfection.

CHAPTER VI.

1782—1783.

Bannister in private life.—His Father highly esteemed,—Mr. Fox's opinion of his wit,—He is received at Carlton House.—Behaviour of the Prince of Wales.—Charles the Second and Tom Durfey.—Vivacity and spirit of Jack Bannister.—Miss Harper,—Her situation at the Haymarket and Covent Garden Theatres,—Her excellent character, and conduct.—Bannister courts and marries her.—Prognostics of the prudent—falsified by Bannister's conduct.—Drury Lane.—Mrs. Siddons the great attraction,—Her unrivalled fame.—Bannister plays Somerville in The Fatal Interview, an unsuccessful tragedy; Chamont in The Orphan; Sprightly in The Adventures of a Night.—Massinger's City Madam.—Bannister in Tradewell.—Haymarket.—Orlando in As you like it; Spatterdash in The Young Quaker; Colonel Foible in The Receipt-tax; Simon in Seeing is Believing; Martius in The Triumph of Honour; Florizel in The Sheep Shearing; Leontine in The Good-natured Man.—Volpone revived.—Palmer in Volpone;—Bensley, Mosca;—Parsons, Carbaccio;—Bannister, Voltore,—His great excellence in the character.—Observations on the piece.

HAVING now followed Bannister through his first dramatic seasons, and brought him to the age of twenty-three, it is proper to view him in private life, both as to his own character, and his connexions.

His father, still at the height of his powers, retained his hold on the public with undiminished force. His wit was in its highest state of celebrity. Bernard, who was well acquainted with the parties of whom he wrote, says that, "after Sheridan, Mr. Fox used to be most pleased with Charles Bannister, whose quiet and sustained humour contrasted strongly with the sudden flashings of the manager's wit. It was the difference of daylight and lightning." His convivial talents were the joy of every party in which he presented himself. He formed the centre of those gay and spirited clubs, (very different from the meetings now bearing the name,) which, at that period, cheered society and animated the metropolis; such were the Anacreontic, the Beef-steak, the Catch Club, and many others, which swarmed in all parts of the town, displaying every species of social talent and of eccentric whim.

Nor was Charles Bannister celebrated in these societies alone; private parties the most select, and often the most exalted, gladly saw him among their numbers; and, at a later period, he was often seen at the table of the Prince of Wales. It once occurred to me, as probably it has to many others, that in such an assemblage the heir-apparent might possibly descend from the elevated station which it became him to maintain, and I asked Charles for information.

"The Prince," he answered, "never assumed familiarity with us, though his demeanour was always most gracious. We, public performers, sat all together, as all guests took their places according to their rank; our conversation was to ourselves, and we never mixed in that of the general party, further than to answer questions. At proper moments, with his inimitable politeness he would suggest that he should be pleased with a song, and the individual selected received his highest reward in praises which his Royal Highness bestowed with an excellent judgment, and expressed with a taste peculiar to himself." King Charles the Second, who, whatever were his faults, was certainly an accomplished gentleman, carried his condescension much further; for in one of Durfey's publications, called "Songs compleat, pleasant, and divertive," he heads one with a description, that he had the honour to sing it with King Charles at Windsor, his Majesty holding one part of the paper with Tom himself.

Jack Bannister, for by that familiar appellation he was now generally known, possessed in a high degree the same social powers, song excepted, which distinguished his father. If the witty sayings of Charles were repeated with applause, those of his son were also frequent in men's mouths; and in society, joy became more animated, and wit more poignant, when he appeared than it had been before. His name was

often mentioned in public as a reveller in scenes of gaiety and frolic; and, when the course of events rendered it necessary, it became well known that he was not deficient in spirit or in skill "to take his own part," in the ordinary, as well as the theatrical world. Such a disposition, aided by youth, inexperience, and self confidence, might have led to unpropitious results, but for a prudent and judicious mind by which they are governed, and an event which at once gave a correct and defined limitation to his views, and drew forth those virtues which were to grace his character and ensure his happiness.

Miss Elizabeth Harper was principal singer at the Haymarket theatre; a near, I believe the nearest, relation of Mr. Rundell, the eminent goldsmith. She had improved a voice of the first quality by an excellent musical education, close study, and unremitting practice. It is a feeble tribute to say, that her character was without blemish; there was, in her appearance and conduct, an unpretending innocence, a candid simplicity, which every one hailed as the sure guarantee of a spotless mind. Yet she wanted not a proper spirit and dignity: the true scope of her character might be gathered from her performance of the Lady, in "Comus;" a part which she adorned, not only by her musical talents, but by a demeanour which expressed confiding gentleness, supported by immovable principle, with all the charm of reality.

At Covent Garden, as well as the Haymarket, Miss Harper held the position of principal singer, surrounded by voices of great force and celebrity,—Mrs. Kennedy, Mrs. Martyr, and Signora Sestini; but it is extraordinary that neither theatre could produce a man, young enough to appear in characters with her, who had the appearance of a gentleman, or a tolerable voice. Thus, when she was Rosetta in "Love in a Village," Cecilia in "The Son-in-law," or Laura in "The Agreeable Surprise;" Young Meadows, Bouquet, and Eugene were consigned to Brett, to a stick named Wood, and to Davies, commonly called the Kiddy. In other pieces, such as "Gretna Green" and "Rosina," Charles Bannister, although his age defied any illusion, assumed the part of her lover.

What the father simulated on the stage, the son performed in reality. He made his addresses to Miss Harper, and they were married at Hendon, on the 26th January 1783. This union, to which prudence and propriety conduced as well as affection, met its due reward in an unwearied attachment of more than half a century's duration. Far different were the prognostics issued by grave anticipators of future evil. "Ah," said they, "that poor girl has saved up some money, and that thoughtless fellow will squander it all. Her fortune will afford a short moment of pleasure, and then her talents must be taxed to support his dissipation." They were totally deceived: Ban-

nister settled into the quiet duties and regular pursuits of married life gracefully and unostentatiously; not displaying the affected rigour produced by a sudden resolution, but the well-considered determination which denotes firmness and insures perseverance.

In the last moments of his bachelor life, Bannister displayed his love of frolic. During his journey to Hendon he urged the coachman to drive fast, by repeated exclamations that he was going to be married, and ludicrous expressions of eager impatience. After the ceremony, the young couple took possession of apartments in Bedford Street, Covent Garden; but, unfortunately, the mistress of the house was seriously inclined: she considered it a sin, or nearly approaching it, to permit profane stage-players to occupy a portion of her "sober dwelling," and so contrived to expel them, by frequently raising their rent. They went then to reside in Frith Street.

The Drury Lane season (1782-3) was distinguished by a memorable event, the appearance of Mrs. Siddons. She now came forward, not as in Garrick's time, to seek an humble and precarious station in the dramatic corps, but to rise at once to the highest position, from which she was never afterward to be removed. Her first appearance (Oct. 10), in Isabella, decided her popularity. The town, enchanted by her powers, seemed to think lightly of all other theatrical performances. On some nights,

when she played, a portion of the pit, in the moderate-sized theatre of that day, was parted off as boxes; gentlemen secured the front seats in the gallery for ladies, who must else have felt the same disappointment with hundreds who were, every night, obliged to return ungratified for want of places. Adverse criticism was hardly essayed against her; the little which was attempted, was confined to pouting reminiscences of Mrs. Cibber, Mrs. Pritchard, Mrs. Crawford, and Mrs. Yates: but the sobs, the screams, and the faintings of the ladies, and the unrestrained tears of the other sex, spoke her powers. When the pieces ended in which she performed, the house was nearly emptied, so few chose to remain to dull their excited feelings by attending a farce. Her salary was raised; she had two productive benefits; presents flowed in upon her from all quarters, and one, in particular, ought not to be forgotten; it was a subscription from the gentlemen of the bar, presented (I need hardly say, with an elegant and appropriate address,) by Mr. Erskine. In acquiring all this applause, she never availed herself of the renown of Shakspeare. She played but six characters: Isabella, by Southerne; Euphrasia, by Murphy; Jane Shore and Calista, by Rowe; Belvidera, by Otway; and Zara, in "The Mourning Bride," by Congreve. One attempt was made to place her before the public in a new tragedy in prose,

said to be written by Hull, called "The Fatal Interview;" it was withdrawn after two or three nights, and not printed. Bannister had a character in it, called Somerville, but of its particular merits or demerits I am unable to speak; the biographers of Mrs. Siddons do not so much as mention the play.

As I now consider Bannister a person whose name is established and station fixed, and as there will be in an Appendix a list of all the characters he performed, I shall not, with the same minuteness that I have observed while he was struggling into notice, detail every part that he performed; but dwell principally on such as materially influenced his reputation, or brought him into contact with some author whose work it is necessary to describe with particularity, or with some conspicuous performer.

In the course of this season he made a new attempt in tragedy; but tragedy without Mrs. Siddons had no command over public attention, and little notice was taken of his Chamont, in "The Orphan." A farce, named "The Adventures of a Night," was vamped up from Fielding's "Justice caught in his own Trap," in which Bannister played Sprightly, an university student; but the meagre success which attended this feeble foundling was to be attributed almost entirely to the charming singing and beautiful person of Miss Phillips, so long known and admired as Mrs. Crouch.

Massinger's "City Madam" was revived on the 29th of April, a circumstance overlooked by Mr. Gifford when he published his edition of the poet; but as this revival was only for the benefit of Baddeley, and the play, although strongly cast, does not appear to have been repeated, the fact may well have escaped the notice of the learned critic and editor. The principal character is Luke, who having been redeemed from the Compter, into which he had been plunged by his prodigality, is received into the family of Sir John Frugal, his brother and benefactor, but retained in a menial and degraded state, suffering the greatest indignities from his brother's wife, a proud upstart "City Madam," who gives denomination to the play, and her daughters, worthily trained to tread in her steps of pride and extravagance.

> "My proud lady
> Admits him to her table, marry, ever
> Beneath the salt; and there he sits, the subject
> Of her contempt and scorn: the dinner ended,
> His courteous nieces find employment for him,
> Fitting an under 'prentice or a footman,
> And not an uncle."

Thus reduced, Luke, who has ruined himself by every fashionable vice and luxury, appears a model of meekness, humanity, and good-fellowship. He persuades his brother to believe in his virtues by a pathetic pleading for some unfortunate debtors; while,

on the other hand, by glowing descriptions of the pleasures of the town, the gaming ordinary, and similar scenes, he gains the confidence and corrupts the minds of the young men, his brother's apprentices, until they do not hesitate to intrust him with the secret how they, and others in their class of life, carry on their projects of dissipation and clandestine pleasure, by robbing their masters. As a punishment to his wife and daughters, and a trial of his brother, Sir John Frugal causes it to be rumoured that he has become a monk, and therefore civilly dead, and has made a will, bequeathing all his real and personal property to his brother. The supposed heir, for a short time, professes the utmost kindness and benevolence; but soon exhibits himself as a griping extortioner, a cruel and unrelenting oppressor. Contrary to all his former promises and professions, he puts in force the penalty of bonds, exacts the forfeitures incurred by the sureties of the apprentices, and enjoys a fiend-like delight in exulting over the woes, deriding the complaints, and sternly repelling the entreaties of his victims. To his female relatives his conduct is still more savage, transcending immeasurably the bounds which their conduct to him would warrant. His insults and cruelty to them are ferocious and unmanly; but here the catastrophe is introduced. Sir John Frugal, convinced of the reformation of his wife and daughters, and the wicked-

ness of his brother, appears and discovers himself; his daughters are united to lovers whom they had before treated with unjustifiable haughtiness, and Luke is dismissed to poverty, disgrace, and contempt.

Luke was played by Palmer; and, although he never fell into absolute badness, no one can conceive the true force of the character who did not see it performed by Kean in 1814, when Sir James Bland Burges altered the piece, and it was produced under the name of "Riches, or the Wife and the Brother."

At the present revival Bannister performed Tradewell, one of the apprentices; and the gay, swaggering, licentious humour of the old-fashioned city youth, and the mortified dejection of a young craven whose comb has been suddenly cut, could not be more effectively displayed.

In the Haymarket season, "As you like it" was played, for the purpose of introducing Miss Frodsham, a young lady of great talent and merit, in Rosalind. Bannister supported the interesting part of Orlando, and exhibited with great applause its various characteristics of firmness, self-estimation, resentment of indignities, generous friendship, and sincere attachment, without any mixture of arrogance, intemperance, or submissive meanness. In fact, Orlando is one of several characters which a player aspiring to the highest walks in his art, but

restrained by the regulations of the theatre, and the duty of deferring to the established claims of others, does wisely in appropriating to himself. Mr. Kemble displayed that excellent judgment and good taste which characterised his dramatic career, when, waiting for the time at which Mr. Smith's retirement should leave his possession of the first line of tragic parts undisputed, he played Orlando, Bassanio, Cromwell, and several similar parts, which always showed the actor to advantage, and conciliated the favourable opinion of the audience.

O'Keefe produced (29th July) a comedy in five acts, called "The Young Quaker." It was his first attempt at a regular comedy, and he had, as he informs us, intended it for an opera, but, by the advice of Mr. Colman, gave it this more serious form. Criticism was anticipated by a bantering prologue, in which he laughed at his desertion of his old friends and supporters, to essay a new line of writing; where he supposes a critic to inquire where is

> "Edwin's droll fal-lal, tag-rag, al concetto,
> Charles Bannister's bold bass and humorous falsetto?"

But without these aids, the comedy, which had considerable merit, met with deserved success; it was performed eighteen times. The part assigned to Bannister,—that of Spatterdash, an officer's ser-

vant,—had not sufficient influence in the plot, nor sufficient importance in itself, to deserve a particular analysis. Although this piece has been frequently performed since its first season, it can live only in the memory of spectators; for when, after fifteen years, the author, at a period of great distress, published a collection of his dramatic pieces, the manager, who had bought the copyright, refused him permission to print the comedy.

In the course of this season, Bannister played some original characters in new, and some in revived pieces. Of the former were Colonel Foible, in "The Receipt-tax," an ephemeral farce by Mr. Dent, which had its name only from the creation of a new and unpopular, but useful and productive impost; and Simon in a dramatic proverb, from the French, called "Seeing is Believing."

Among the characters in revived pieces may be mentioned Martius, in Beaumont and Fletcher's "Triumph of Honour;" Florizel, in "The Sheep Shearing," an unsuccessful attempt of Colman to give vogue to a portion of Shakspeare's "Winter's Tale;" and Leontine, in Goldsmith's "Good-natured Man."

Of the merits of these pieces it is unnecessary to say anything; but at a late period of the season, (12th September,) Mr. Colman revived Jonson's "Volpone," or "The Fox." This comedy, a

favourite during a long series of years, was justly vaunted by its author as a specimen of his readiness in inventing, and diligence in composing. In his prologue, he says, of some envious critics,

" And when his plays come forth, think they can flout them,
With saying he was a year about them.
To this there needs no lie, but this his creature,
Which was, two months since, no feature,
And, though he dares give them five lives to mend it,
'Tis known five weeks fully penn'd it
From his own hand, without a coadjutor,
Novice, journeyman, or tutor."

The old adage, *quod citò fit, citò perit,* was not verified in the fate of this comedy. It was played at both the universities, highly applauded in the metropolis, and commemorated by Ben's contemporaries in the homely though hearty distich,

" The Fox, the Alchymist, and Silent Woman,
Done by Ben Jonson, are outdone by no man."

On the revival of the drama, after the gloomy prevalence of republicanism and puritanism, " The Fox " took an early place among the popular entertainments; and in the polite age of Steele and Addison it was regarded by some as the first, and by all as among the foremost, of dramatic productions. A century after it had been written (27th May 1709,) it was reproduced at one of the theatres; and Sir Richard Steele said, in his favoured periodi-

cal, the Tatler, "I wonder the modern writers do not use their interest in the house to suppress such representations. A man that has been at this, will hardly like any other play during the season."

Mr. Colman's revival was supported by the whole strength of his dramatic company. Palmer—in the best of his days, ardent, buoyant, and endowed with everlasting vivacity,—supported the character of the simulating voluptuary; his declamation, his malignant mirth, his audacious love, and, in the end, his manly, uncontrollable anger, were all equally great, all irresistible. Bensley showed, in the character of Mosca, the knowledge of stage business, and the judgment which an excellent understanding, fortified by long practice, could supply; and, in playing this part, all those peculiarities which afforded a theme to minor critics, and a pattern to inferior mimics, seemed to be discarded. There was no peculiar solemnity in his port, but on the contrary he was brisk and agile; his eye glared not with its usual significancy, but was illumined with archness and satirical pleasantry; and his voice, unincumbered with his nasal twang, gave out, with sonorous vivacity, the sarcastic observations which the other characters provoked.

Addison, in the Spectator, has mentioned in terms of the highest applause Mr. Johnson's performance of Corbaccio, but it is impossible to conceive a pic-

ture more perfect than that displayed by Parsons; it was, notwithstanding the distaste it created, irresistibly comic. It was that of a man reduced by age to the lowest state of decrepitude,—lame, deaf, almost blind; abounding in wealth, and yet so desirous of increasing it, that he descends to the low arts of a legacy-hunter, prepares to disinherit his virtuous son, and even accedes to a proposal to murder the sick man, that he may shorten the period of anxious expectation. Around this character Parsons threw the charm of his pungent humour, and made it one of the most striking exhibitions the theatre had ever produced. Splenetic impatience, jealous irritability, hasty suspicion, were associated with stupid misintelligence, idiotic repetition of phrases, and a blundering assent to propositions which he could not distinctly hear, or rightly understand. So much infirmity would not have been comic, but for the admixture of vice; nor could so much vice have been endured, had it not been qualified by a little pity for age, decrepitude, and a failing intellect.

To Bannister was assigned the part of Voltore the lawyer, and the impression he made was strong and favourable. The character is not marked by any peculiar feature of vice, or any act of extraordinary flagitiousness. He takes a ticket in the Volpone lottery, and helps to turn the wheel, in hopes of gaining the prize. In the first scene, he presents to

the pretended invalid a massy piece of plate; and receives from his contrivance, and the words of Mosca, the assurance that he is sole heir, the will just executed, "the wax warm, and the ink scarce dry." In this there is little scope for the exercise of Bannister's talent; yet he did all that could be effected, and prepared the audience to expect higher exertions. Much of his peculiar humour was displayed in listening to the advice and promises of Mosca, and particularly in his manner of receiving the left-handed compliment to his profession:

> "I oft have heard him say how he admired
> Men of your large profession, that could speak
> To every cause, and things mere contraries,
> 'Till they were hoarse again, yet all be law;
> That, with most quick agility, could turn,
> And re-return; could make knots, and undo them;
> Give forked counsel; take provoking gold
> On either hand, and put it up: thus men,
> He knew, would thrive with their humility;
> And for his part, he thought, he should be blest
> To have his heir of such a suffering spirit,
> So wise, so grave, of so perplex'd a tongue,
> And loud withal, that would not wag, nor scarce
> Lie still, without a fee; when every word
> Your worship but lets fall, is a chequin."

In the progress of the comedy, events arise which call forth the exertions of the advocate to plead a cause in the scrutineo, or senate-house. In this scene or rather scenes,—for there is a sort of supplemental hearing,—Bannister displayed his powers to

the utmost advantage. He delivered a long speech with exaggerated emphasis, marked his antitheses with curious changes of enunciation, threw forth his abuse with thundering vehemence, and appealed to passion, pity, and feeling, with insinuating softness. In his mode of declaiming he was reported to have copied in some degree the manner of Mr. Fox, then in the vigour of his age, at the height of his renown, and a leading member of the administration then in power, generally called "the Coalition Ministry." Mr. Fox had the habit of striking his hat with his fist while speaking, and is said sometimes to have utterly ruined a new dress feathered hat in one debate. Bannister adopted this peculiarity, and laid about him with most impressive energy.

But his triumph was yet to come. Before the second hearing, new occurrences made Voltore desirous to undo the effect of his former pleading, and he had sent to the judges a statement in writing of the frauds which had been practised on them. While he is supporting this new statement, another change in the aspect of affairs renders it necessary for him to retract his confession and regain his old position. But how? After much confused hesitation, he adopts a mode of conduct suggested by Mosca, and pretends that his late proceedings have been the effect of diabolical possession. At this period Bannister's voice falters; his eyes look wild,

amazed and haggard; his full, bold sentences dwindle down into ill-composed, unconnected, unintelligible phrases; and at last, in a manner which he alone could attain, he throws himself on the floor, with an epileptic plunge, violent, desperate, and yet in the highest degree comic: and when Mosca, to humour the deceit, described pretended symptoms, his vomiting crooked pins, his eyes being just like a dead hen's in a poulterer's shop, and the passage of the fiend through various parts of his body, till at length it flies out, like a blue toad with bat's wings, —corresponding contortions and appearances were adopted, and the audience were in an ecstasy of delight.

"Volpone" had only been played three nights when the theatre closed; and it has never, in a period of fifty-four years, been re-produced. Mr. Gifford, having stated this fact, observes with his characteristic severity, "That it was not successful cannot be wondered at: the age of dramatic imbecility was rapidly advancing upon us, and the stage already looked to jointed dolls, water-spaniels, and peacocks' tails, for its main credit and support." That a poet and a critic of Mr. Gifford's strength should feel indignation at the neglect of such a production as "The Fox," cannot be wondered at. His complaints of dramatic imbecility are not unfounded; but yet, differing from his opinion with the reserve

which such a difference ought ever to occasion, I cannot help thinking that, in the present age, "Volpone" could not, for much higher reasons than those which depend on jointed dolls and peacocks' tails, possibly become a favourite. The practice of former times affords no precedent for ours. In all this comedy there is hardly a trait of virtue; Celia and Bonario are not worth mentioning: and the conduct of the piece turns, not upon glaring, or, as they are called, splendid vices, but on sordid meannesses. Volpone, a high Venetian noble, rich beyond all reasonable desire, without an ambitious pursuit, without even a beloved heir to aggrandize, betakes himself to a base course of deception to gull other men of their property. The idea of this fraud seems to have been derived from a passage in the satire of Petronius Arbiter; but the deceivers he introduces are abandoned young rakes whom luxurious indulgence has reduced to poverty, and who, animated by no honourable principle, spend their lives in pursuits which render them worthy to rank only with such mean adventurers as Lazarillo de Tormes, Estevanillo Gonzales, or Meriton Latroon. Avarice is the impelling passion, not of Volpone alone, but of every other individual in the play; and it is exhibited without any variety, save that which peculiarities of character and humour occasion. Volpone is not grand in his objects, like Sir Giles

Overreach; or animated, like Shylock, with resentment for personal wrongs, or indignation at the sufferings of a whole people. Nor have any of the other personages the ludicrous thrift of Harpagon, or old Philpot; they are really mere hungry sharks, ravenously pursuing the vessel which is supposed to contain the dying passenger, unconscious of the latent hook prepared for their destruction.

CHAPTER VII.

1783 — 1784 — 1785.

Drury Lane season.—Two Kembles—Stephen appears in Othello at Covent Garden—John Philip in Hamlet at Drury Lane—he is put forward as the rival of Mr. Henderson—their liberal feelings toward each other.—Mr. Kemble plays Sir Giles Overreach. —Observations on this character, and on the general structure of Massinger's play.—Bannister performs Allworth—he plays Lovel in High Life below Stairs, Jack Stocks in the Lottery, Juba in Cato.—Haymarket season.—Prelude, called the Election of a Manager—its scope and success—its run abruptly terminated.—Intimacy between Bannister and the younger Colman.—Two to One, an Opera.—Hayley's Lord Russel, and Two Connoisseurs; both in rhyme.—Bannister plays Tancred—Lovewell in The Clandestine Marriage.—Drury Lane season, 1784-5.—Bannister plays Cassio in Othello—Douglas—Florizel—Paul in The Fool, by Captain Topham.—The Humorist, a farce by Mr. Cobb —the Prologue spoken by Bannister—its happy allusions to recent events—his success in that and in the part of Dabble.—Haymarket.—O'Keeffe's Beggar on Horseback.—Bannister plays Horace.—Turk and no Turk, by Colman the younger, in which he is Mat Moneo, an Attorney.—Mrs. Inchbald's I'll Tell You What—Bannister, Charles Euston.—Westminster Hall in an Uproar—Serjeant Gloss.—All's Well that Ends Well.—He plays Parolles for his benefit.

WHEN Bannister next joined the corps, Drury Lane theatre had received a new accession of tragic force. The glorious renown of Mrs. Siddons had made

it known that she had two brothers in the same profession; that one of them had acquired considerable reputation on the provincial boards, and was styled, in the advertisiug phrase, the great Mr. Kemble. But the brothers were alike unknown in the metropolis: each manager secured one; and the puff preliminary was copiously employed to excite public curiosity in deciding the question, "Which is the great Mr. Kemble?" All the circumstances which were common to both were marshalled in formal array. Both were brothers of Mrs. Siddons; both had appeared with reputation at provincial theatres; and both were announced in London in eminent characters of Shakspeare. Of Mr. Stephen Kemble, who was first produced at Covent Garden, it is not necessary here to say much; in Othello, he was deservedly well received; he performed the part like a scholar, a critic, and a gentleman: but he was not qualified to shine in the same hemisphere where the lustre of his sister was resplendent, and his substantial form gave rise to a pleasantry of the minor critics, that, although he might be called the big, he never could justly be termed the great Mr. Kemble.

His brother, John Philip Kemble, destined, and eminently qualified, to adorn the dramatic world, appeared a week afterward (30th September) in Hamlet; and established at once a firm reputation, founded on merits and efforts which subsequent

years improved, but which neither negligence, vice, nor time ever impaired. It were foreign to the purpose of this narrative to attempt a critical survey of his qualifications: it may suffice to observe that, at this period, the graces of his person, and the power of his elocution, were the subject of general praise; while some peculiarities in the emphasis which he laid on the author's words, afforded unusual scope for discussion to those who dwell on the minute discriminations of verbal criticism.

As Mr. Henderson had acquired high renown in the character of Hamlet, and retained it to this period as the worthy successor of Garrick, it was natural to consider Mr. Kemble as his rival in the part; the comparison was to the interest of the juvenile performer, and not disgraceful or injurious to him whose fame had been long established. It generated between them none of those peevish feelings which jealousy creates in little minds; so far were these gentlemen from entertaining such sentiments, that, at a late period of his life, Mr. Kemble has been heard to describe it as one of his misfortunes that he never had the advantage of improving by any performer better than himself, except Mr. Henderson. But, whatever might be the feelings of the performers, it was the evident interest of the managers that the public should consider them as

personal rivals, and create, if possible, a party contest between them.

It was therefore speedily announced that Mr. Kemble, "not having the fear of Henderson before his eyes," intended soon to appear as Sir Giles Overreach. This character, a prodigy in the drama, had long been undervalued, until, in 1781, it was displayed in its fullest colours, and in the strongest light, by Mr. Henderson. Sir Giles is justly described by one of the personages in the play as being "both a lion and a fox in his proceedings." His wickedness, although its ends are selfish and mean, is, in all parts, grand and daring; and his personal qualities, although debased by an insatiable cupidity and low ambition, have in them so much that is striking, bold, and courageous, that he stands on the stage a solitary and appalling example of an excess of vice and injustice, founded on the absence of all religious feeling,—on the profession, not of indifference alone, but of unqualified atheism.

"To have a usurer," (says one,) "that starves himself,
And wears a cloak of one-and-twenty years
On a suit of fourteen groats, bought of the hangman,
To grow rich and then purchase, is too common:
But this Sir Giles feeds high, keeps many servants,
Who must, at his command, do any outrage.
Rich in his habit, vast in his expenses;
Yet he, to admiration, still increases
In wealth and lordships.

He frights men out of their estates;
And breaks through all law-nets made to curb ill men,
As they were cobwebs. No man dares reprove him.
Such a spirit to dare, and power to do, were never
Lodged so unluckily."

Of himself he says,

"Do I wear a sword for fashion?—or is this arm
Shrunk up or wither'd? Does there live a man,
Of that large list I have encounter'd with,
Can truly say I e'er gave inch of ground
Not purchas'd with his blood that did oppose me?"

Again, in answer to the remonstrance,

"Are you not frighted with the imprecations
And curses of whole families, made wretched
By your sinister practices?"

He says,

"As rocks are
When foamy billows split themselves against
Their flinty ribs; or as the moon is mov'd
When wolves, with hunger pinch'd, howl at her brightness.
I am of a solid temper, and like these
Steer on a constant course: with mine own sword,
If called into the field, I can make that right
Which fearful enemies murmur'd at as wrong.
Now for these other piddling complaints
Breath'd out in bitterness; as when they call me
Extortioner, tyrant, cormorant, or intruder
On my poor neighbour's right, or grand incloser
Of what was common, to my private use;
Nay, when my ears are pierced with widows' cries,
And undone orphans wash with tears my threshold,
I only think what 'tis to have my daughter

Right honourable; and 'tis a powerful charm
Makes me insensible of remorse or pity,
Or the least sting of conscience."

n this character, grand and formidable in its ng, there is no apologizing, no redeeming quality econcile us to its bad properties. Shylock is a rer, an oppressor, and, in intent at least, a mur- er; but he professes indignation, besides his own ional insults and wrongs, for an ill-used, oppress- and suffering people: his domestic affections, al- ugh ruggedly expressed, are at least natural and uous. He regrets the loss of his turquoise, be- se he had it from Leah when he was a bachelor; l, although his care for his daughter is tainted h meanness and suspicion, he inculcates into her id no vicious or corrupt thought. Overreach, on contrary, does not profess to be animated by any riotic or public feeling; and in order to secure the ect of his vain desire,—a noble alliance,—he per- des his child to hesitate at no wickedness, not n the surrender of her chastity, more effectually ensnare her admirer. Shylock was the mere fic- n of Shakspeare; but Massinger derived the idea, ough not the whole character of his villain, from ontemporary, known in history and in the records parliament.

Overreach's fall, which terminates in hopeless in- ity, is occasioned by contrivances so gross and

inartificial, that critics have doubted whether the poet has not shown want of skill in making a man so astute and worldly, so easy a dupe. Such an observation shows a very slender acquaintance with the annals of crime, whether on a confined or an extensive scale. Instances innumerable might be produced, where, in pursuit of guilty ends, the wary mind has lapsed into negligence; security has been indulged where vigilance was most required, and the fall of the wicked man seems precipitated by his own acts or omissions. As if he anticipated some such criticism as that above adverted to, Massinger says,

> "Hard things are compass'd oft by easy means;
> And judgment being a gift deriv'd from Heav'n,
> Though sometimes lodg'd in the hearts of worldly men
> That ne'er consider from whom they receiv'd it,
> Forsakes such as abuse the giver of it:
> Which is the reason that the politic
> And cunning statesman, that believes he fathoms
> The counsels of all kingdoms on the earth,
> Is by simplicity oft over-reach'd."

And Mr. Gifford very properly terms this "an admirable observation, worthy of all praise."

If this play has never been permanently popular and attractive, the cause is not the defect of skill in portraying characters; nothing can be more bold, vivid, and judicious: nor the deficiency of interest in the scenes; they are always surprising and affecting: nor any negligence in filling the parts; for,

in our own times, Henderson and Kemble, Cooke and Kean, successively, or in rivalship, have displayed their powers in Sir Giles, and all the other characters have been adequately represented: but the play, void of anything like perfect virtue, does not recommend itself to our affections. Poetic justice is effected; the crafty man is subdued by craft, and the perpetrator of wrong and violence is borne down by a combination: yet we do not view with pleasure a nobleman and a lady of exalted rank, condescending to a series of frauds and false semblances to impose on a man whom they dare not openly encounter; and, while we rejoice in the fall of the overbearing oppressor, it is with an unsatisfactory feeling that we see the blow by which he is prostrated dealt by the hands of his own daughter, and of his own nephew, even although he has merited his hate by plundering him of his property, insulting his distress, and planning and soliciting his death. They who enjoy with pleasure the successful deceit, and applaud the ignominious dismissal of Marall, must feel a little inward dissatisfaction at the triumph of Margaret.

In this revival for Mr. Kemble, Bannister played very ably the part of Allworth,—a mild, honourable, and docile youth, animated by the best sentiments, and inspired by a genuine passion for the daughter of Overreach. Some of the contrivance

which goes through the play devolves upon him; but his share in the action never amounts to more than the laws of the drama, and of fiction in general, have allowed to aspiring lovers, opposed by undutiful parents or too prudent guardians.

On the night of Mr. Kemble's first appearance, Bannister saw that his own future performance of Hamlet was extremely improbable; but he played in the after-piece, "High life below stairs," the part of Lovel with his accustomed humour and spirit, and with perfect success. This lively and ingenious farce is made to display the misrule, insolence, waste, and plunder which prevail among servants where a proper control is not established, and which even the most vigilant and judicious regulations cannot always suppress. If we can allow it possible (and what may not be allowed in a farce?) that merely by putting on an humble attire, assuming a sheepish air, and pretending to abject humility, ignorance, and simplicity, a gentleman can so disguise himself that not one of his own domestic servants shall have the least suspicion of his identity, then the whole business of the piece "rolls as from a smooth descent," and the exposure and punishment of the delinquents are brought about by means equally probable and satisfactory; but a man who cannot so far favour the lively scenes, naturally and effectively as they are exhibited in this performance, as to forget or

pardon, or even to refuse to perceive this incongruity, must go to a playhouse so enveloped in scruples that all the avenues to pleasure will be closed.

In the residue of the season, Bannister had little business that was important or interesting. The revival of Fielding's farce, "The Lottery," afforded him the part of Jack Stocks, a creature considerably below a common counting-house coxcomb, but to which he imparted a tone and colouring which, for a time, animated the dead body of this silly piece, and rendered it somewhat popular. It was, at the time, brought into contact with the public feeling by the annual practice of drawing a state lottery during a term of six or seven weeks; and the numerous contrivances of insurances, policies, and those adventures which in the farce and in the lottery-offices were termed horses, by which unprincipled adventurers preyed on the credulous, excited avarice, and generated crime. The process of drawing the tickets in Guildhall, with the wheels, the blue-coat boys, and the rest of the apparatus, was exhibited on the stage.

On the 28th of April, Bannister played Juba for his own benefit. Mr. Kemble performed Cato, but the time was not yet arrived when his lofty excellence in Roman characters was fully perceived and acknowledged; for the present he assumed the character but once.

At the Haymarket, Bannister appeared in several new parts, and was in some respects placed in a new situation. The manager, to open the house, wrote a prelude, called "The Election of Manager." As the city of Westminster had been kept in a state of tumult and confusion from the first day of April to the middle of May, by the protracted contest between Mr. Fox and Sir Cecil Wray, and as the heat which had raged so long was still kept up in its utmost height by a scrutiny which had been granted by the high-bailiff, it would seem that the 2nd of June was a very early day for the production of a piece in which it was expected, and indeed not denied, that the topics which had so recently occasioned so much agitation would be adverted to. The Lord Chamberlain's licence was for a while delayed, but at length the prelude did appear; and it was sufficiently pointed in its allusions to leave no doubt of the aim, although it contained no matter which could justly give offence. Edwin supported a character which in dress and manners perfectly represented Sam House, a patriotic publican in Wardour Street, who made himself talked of in various ways: he was a vehement advocate for liberty and Charley; he wore no stockings, and a dive off Westminster Bridge at high-tide was one of his frequent recreations. Through so many avenues, he could not fail in arriving at the temple of Fame; and he left

the world with at least as much distinction as he could have expected, for, when he died in 1785, Mr. Fox, who among his very numerous wants never included good-nature, attended his funeral. Miss Farren and Mrs. Webb represented a beautiful and accomplished Duchess, and a lady, afterward a peeress, whose exertions in favour of Mr. Fox, carried, as scandal asserted, to an extreme point of condescension, formed a subject of violent animadversion. It is plain, however, that the author of the prelude had no intention to make, nor did the parties who would have been most sensitive apprehend, any offensive allusion; had it been so, considering how she was received, among the leaders of Mr. Fox's party, Miss Farren would never have placed herself on the stage to be the vehicle of any odious insinuation: the calumny itself, if it had a moment's effect during the frenzy of the contest, evaporated into "thin air" before the glowing beams of the Duchess's character. I find, by his manuscript list, that Bannister performed two characters in this piece; what they were I know not: the run was not long, being terminated by a persevering frolic of a young man of fashion, of which the younger Colman, in his Random Records, gives this account: "The prelude was well received, and went on smoothly for several nights, when an unexpected storm arose. A Mr. Bob Monckton, a buck (a fat

one too) of that era,—son to General Monckton of Quebec memory, whose figure stands prominent in West's picture of the death of General Wolfe,—came night after night into a stage-box, to hiss, hoot, and cry 'Off, off!' till he was hoarse as a raven. This idle young gentleman, it was thought, hooted and croaked from no other motive but mere wantonness: however, as one foe, like one fool, makes many, he excited a formidable opposition to the piece;—it was thus checked in its career, and soon laid aside."

Colman the younger, who, at this period, had just completed his twenty-first year, returned from his studies at Aberdeen, and sought fame in London as a dramatic writer. This period forms an epoch in the life of Bannister. They had formed an acquaintance, several years previously, behind the scenes at the Haymarket, which soon ripened into friendship, often sallying out, as was natural at their age, in frolic; and when Colman's academic pursuits ought to have kept him in Scotland, if an adventurous spirit led him to London, the pleasure of honest Jack's society was always one of his motives and his sure resource.

The intimacy thus formed in their earliest, continued to their latest days. Colman and Bannister, at this period, were almost inseparable. Each was recommended by abundant wit and talent. Ban-

nister was playful, ingenuous, and polite; his friend always shone in apt illustration and lively repartee, and his hospitality was most liberal and delightful.

As author and performer, they were of the highest importance to each other. What the genius of Colman devised, the taste and judgment of Bannister rendered effective by condensation, addition, or retrenchment. The appearance of Bannister's name in the play-bill was said to half-fill the house. Nothing could be more happy than the life of the company in general. All was gaiety before the curtain, all vivacity behind the scene, when Bannister appeared: the players called these his nights. "He is always at home, that son of mine" his father observed; "but never so much as at Georgey Colman's little snuggery in the Hoy-mow." This name was given to the theatre by the lively, thoughtless, incomparable Edwin, and for a time adopted by other performers.

In this season Colman produced, under the auspices of his father, who wrote a prologue for the occasion, his first dramatic piece, a comic opera called "Two to One." The two Bannisters, father and son, and Mrs. Bannister, all had parts in it; the play succeeded, ran its due course in the season, and was forgotten: but, from this time, Colman never brought

forward a drama at any theatre where his friend was engaged, without studying his genius, and accommodating a character to his range of talent.

In the same season two plays by Mr. Hayley, intended, as it was said, only for a private theatre, were exhibited at the Haymarket. The first was a tragedy, in three acts, called "Lord Russel," which appeared on the 18th of August, and in which Bannister enacted Cavendish: it was barely well received; neither fashion nor the newspapers could give it a permanent station. The subject was sufficiently interesting, but the composition most miserable. Thoughts feebly prosaic were encumbered, not elevated, by being doled out in languid lines of ten syllables; void of vigour, although sometimes full of sound; standing like a regiment of invalids, all in a row, but conveying no idea of strength or efficiency. Had this piece appeared before "The Critic," the public could not have failed to suppose some passages in the mock-tragedy had derived from it their origin at least, if not their very form of expression.

Mr. Hayley's comedy, also in three acts, and in rhyme, was called "The two Commissioners," in which Bannister performed the part of Careless. The play is deficient in plot, character, and incident; and has the additional misfortune of being written in eleven-syllable rhymes, a shuffling fashion of com-

position, unfit for most purposes, and not at all adapted to the stage. For some time tragedies in rhyme were endured; but it was only when the mighty genius of Dryden, bending to the taste of a Frenchified court, toiled at productions which would make the London theatres rank with those of Paris. But if Dryden endeavoured to fall into the train of Racine and Corneille, he never rhymed to rival Molière in comedy; what he borrowed from that incomparable author, he expended in plain prose. Many other dramatists—Settle and Crowne, for example,—attempted tragedies in the same manner; but what the author of "Almanzor" and "Aurungzebe" could not accomplish, was far above their powers to achieve. Dryden himself at last renounced the attempt, acknowledging that he felt

> "Passion too fierce in fetters to be bound,
> While Nature flies him like enchanted ground."

In some of Shakspeare's plays there are comic scenes in rhyme, and they have much beauty and effect; but, in any hands, a whole comedy thus composed must become heavy, languid, and tiresome.

Rhymes, which in "Hudibras" are called "the rudder of verses," must clog the sprightly genius of comedy, where all effect in dialogue depends on a quick, neat, unincumbered facility. To make rhymes, the poet who is not most consummately skilful, and sometimes, even the best versifier, must in-

troduce expletives or unmeaning phrases: in comedy, such redundancies are intolerable; sure to create disgust, if they fail in raising indignation. For example:

"Well, I wish you may prosper; but, *as I'm a sinner,*
I as soon should expect a roast Phœnix *for dinner.*"

It is not to be apprehended that any future attempt will be made to revive the plays of Hayley; in fact, as to his works in general, he seems to have prophesied his own fate when he describes Lord Chesterfield as a wit

"Whose value, tried by fashion's varying touch,
Once rose too high, and now is sunk too much."

Bannister performed, in the course of this season, the hero in Thomson's tragedy of "Tancred and Sigismunda" without much effect. The principal intent of the manager was to introduce Miss Woollery, a young West Indian lady of considerable merit and accomplishments, born to good prospects, but labouring under misfortunes. He also played Lovewell, in "The Clandestine Marriage," and made it his own.

Drury Lane season commenced on the 23rd of September 1784. It produced little in which Bannister appeared conspicuously, and was, on the whole, rather inanimate; the principal interest resting on the tragic performances of Kemble and Mrs. Siddons. On Mr. Kemble's first appearance in

Othello, Bannister played Cassio; a character always interesting, but seldom much distinguished, which had usually fallen to the lot of performers of moderate capacity. The soldier, the man of honour, virtue, simplicity, and courage, is yet in the unfortunate position of being a dupe and a victim: Bannister raised it much above its ordinary level; but afterwards, in the hands of Charles Kemble, it received its highest finish in deportment, effect, and interest.

Bannister also played Douglas; and for his own benefit, on the 18th of April 1785, Florizel, in "The Winter's Tale." The part of Perdita was filled by his sister, Miss Bannister, afterward Mrs. Swendall. For the benefit of Mrs. Wells, Captain Topham, her avowed admirer, wrote a feeble and silly farce, called "The Fool," in which Bannister acted a servant named Paul; but the piece was never deemed worthy of much notice, and, I believe, never printed.

His great hit, as it is called in the theatre, was in "The Humorist," a farce written by Mr. Cobb, a gentleman who held a high and honourable station in the India House. It is said that this piece, on perusal, was deemed by Mr. Sheridan unfit for representation; (and truly, considering its dramatic merits alone, his judgment was far from being incorrect;) but Mr. Burke, whose inquiries into the affairs of India may have been much facilitated by Mr. Cobb, prevailed on his friend, the manager, to

give the piece a trial, and it was produced on the 27th April.

Its favourable reception was propitiated by an excellent prologue written by the author, and spoken by Bannister. It took as a sort of text, or theme, the lines from "The Essay on Man"—

> "Eye Nature's walks; shoot Folly as she flies,
> And catch the manners living as they rise."

Pursuing this thought, and describing the difficulty of catching anything so volatile as living manners, the author, with great humour, investigated the events and transactions of modern life, both in fashion and politics. Among the best points may be mentioned, the ridicule of a recent attempt to make the tragedy of Macbeth a subject for the Italian Opera; and Bannister convulsed the audience by reciting, after the manner of a celebrated soprano of the King's theatre, "Mackabete! Mackabete! Eh gardez Mackaduffe." Some of the late events in politics, and the changing views of politicians, were also the subjects of pleasant allusion. The cessation of the Westminster scrutiny, and the commutation tax, by which the duty on tea was reduced, and a compensating impost laid on windows, were celebrated in two lines:

> "The scrutiny is dead, and gone for ever;
> And all the jokes on tea have lost their flavour."

The farce itself, although eminently successful, and repeated during many seasons, possessed no great interest. Bannister's part, its chief support, was that of Dabble, a dentist, a good-natured and not offensive representation of a gentleman named Patence, who was eminent in that profession.

At the Haymarket, Bannister played parts in several new pieces. The first (16th June) was Horace, in a farce by O'Keeffe, called "A Beggar on Horseback." The character from which the piece derives its name was sustained by Edwin,—that of an audacious, assuming, ignorant country clown, who has a handsome sister in the service of an elderly gentleman, rich enough to shrink from no expense, and fool enough to be in love, even to marriage, with his darling Nancy. Her brother, using without sense or moderation the advantages derived from this attachment, usurps every employment in the family,—coachman, butler, gardener; and even seems to displace his master himself, taking his refreshments and putting on his clothes. The old man bears all, and is disposed to submit to everything rather than incur the displeasure of his goddess: but how uncertain is the course of love! the fair arbitress of his destiny has already surrendered her heart (ay, and more too,) to a youth who, under the name of Tinsel, a strolling player, had visited Abingdon, the place of her abode, and made her his

captive. This happy wooer is Horace, the nephew of her present master and admirer, who, quitting his studies at Oxford for a frolic, had achieved the heroic exploit. Tedious were it to recount the embarrassments or the anger of the old gentleman, or the very ridiculous means by which he is reconciled to his nephew. Parsons, Edwin, and Bannister made something out of nothing: the judgment never went with the performance; but O'Keeffe's peculiar quality of making fun prevail, even where wit was absent, gave to the farce a short-lived existence. Bannister gained by it the advantage of displaying that mixture of levity, indiscretion, good sense, and feeling, which he always pourtrayed with so much skill and felicity.

In "Turk or no Turk," an opera by George Colman the younger, he performed the character of Mat Moneo, an attorney; but as ten nights formed the term of its life, and as it was never revived or printed, little notice of it is required. One of its strongest characters was Presto, a starved footman, by Edwin, who had a song quite in the style of the author, to the tune of "The Tailor done over," beginning

> "I 'm worse than poor debtors shut up in their cages,
> Board-wages I have, and the boards for my wages."

Mrs. Bannister played Emily, the heroine, if heroine she may be called; and had a pretty song

to a fashionable French tune, "*Dirai-je mon confiteor?*"

Mrs. Inchbald, already known to the public as an actress, and as the authoress of a farce called "A Mogul Tale, or the Descent of the Balloon," produced a comedy this season. Before her farce was written, this play had been in the hands of the manager, who seemed not very solicitous that it should be performed. After "The Mogul" had by its success given some strength to the lady's pretensions, she reminded Mr. Colman of the comedy; he said, in his answer to her note, "If you will call upon me, I'll tell you what it is:" this expression occurs in two or three very interesting periods of the play; and the notion having struck the manager much more forcibly than the author, it was announced and produced under the name of "I'll tell you what." It had complete success, being played in its first season twenty times. One part of the plot turns on the unhappy circumstances incident to the marriage of a seducer with the divorced wife whose infidelity he has occasioned, he retaining his old libertine inclinations, and endeavouring a second time to make shipwreck of matrimonial happiness by an attempt on the second wife of his own lady's first husband: the circumstance might easily have been made introductory to tragic scenes, or at least to solemn

lectures; but by a much more happy, and not less moral contrivance, it ends in exposing the gallant adventurer to ridicule and contempt. Judiciously connected with this plot is the story of Charles Euston, who, having by an imprudent love-match incurred the displeasure of his father, is obliged to leave his wife in great distress, and open to the attempt of a titled seducer; but she is protected by a benevolent stranger, who turns out to be her husband's father: Charles returns, and his offended parent is reconciled. The character afforded some, although not very ample scope, to the talent of Bannister.

One other new character which he performed may be noticed; not from any particular merit in the piece, or from any great effort made by the performer, but from the oddity of the incident out of which it took its rise. In the course of the spring, the Court of King's Bench was sitting at Westminster, when a sudden and general panic was created; a crash was heard on the roof, and the court was deserted in a moment. This incident furnished Dick Wilson with the subject of a farce for his benefit, which was entitled "Westminster Hall in an uproar." In the first scene, Moses Lyons, an old-clothesman, was introduced, walking his morning rounds; but, when nine o'clock approached, he threw off his "Jewish gaberdine," and in a

fine coat, and broad gold-laced waistcoat, hastened to labour in his other vocation of justifying bail. The court was opened, Wilson playing the Chief Justice, and letting off several of the jokes recorded in Joe Miller, about receiving the gold-laced Moses as bail, because he would "burn for the money;" advising a learned gentleman, who threatened to burn his books, "to read them first;" and other ancient and well-known pleasantries. Bannister, as Serjeant Gloss, was in the midst of a forcible and flowery harangue, when the crash was heard. My Lord Chief Justice leaped on the back of the crier, and was carried out of court a-pick-a-pack: the learned counsel, forgetting points and cases, their briefs, and everything but danger, hurried off with incredible celerity; many losing their wigs, and leaving their gowns behind them, in their eagerness to escape from the fall of that edifice in which they had hoped to rise. Moses alone remained, boasting a good conscience which armed him against vain fears. Looking upward, he discerned the cause of the alarm; which was produced by the misadventure of a housemaid, who had thrown down her pail, and broken the sky-light she was employed in cleaning. The Jew rewarded and fortified his conscience by stowing into his bag the wigs and other property which the fugitive barristers had abandoned.

For his benefit, on the 26th July, Bannister played Parolles, in "All's Well that Ends Well." The character was admirably adapted to his talents, and beneficial to his reputation. In the first part he had to display a vain coxcomb, an empty traveller, a bragging coward, and an obsequious sycophant, patient of affronts, and enduring to be termed an imposter and a knave. In all these scenes, Bannister exhibited the pertness, presumption, and uneasy bustle of such a mind, with the pretended fever of simulated indignation, when reproach touched him too nearly to be misapprehended or evaded. His dress was that of a *point-de-vice* soldier; and his bearing alert, petulant, and confident. In a subsequent scene, where his presumptuous folly leads him into an ambuscade, he is captured and blindfolded by a party of his friends, bent on disclosing him in his true colours, who speaking a pretended language (a good specimen of the unknown tongues) through the organ of a mock interpreter, draw from him all the secrets of his meanness, and leave him overloaded with disgrace and scorn. Degraded and baffled, he still attempts to be considered as an adherent of those with whom he had before claimed equality; and in a mean habiliment, and with corresponding humbleness of speech and gesture, he so far works on the good feelings of an honourable old lord, the great contemner of his former pretensions, as to be

retained in a very humble situation. In this portion of the play, the actor's style was no less masterly than in those which preceded: there was a base humility in his address, a prompt alacrity in his complaisance, a total extinction of everything like pretension, which made the spectator well pleased that the poor wretch should find a comfortable though servile refuge in the charity of the old Lord Lafeu. Bannister received, throughout the piece, warm and well-deserved applause: it was repeated, but could never be a permanent favourite. It has no recommendation to favour but the character of Parolles: Helena, it is true, is virtuous and generous; but her manner of obtaining a husband, against his declared will, and merely at the command of a sovereign,—the heartless and disgusting libertinism of the young Count Bertram, the husband thus disposed of—the quaint conundrum, on the solution of which he makes his reception of his wife to depend,—and the indelicate means by which that solution is effected, form, altogether, a picture not likely in our times to satisfy even a moderately cultivated audience. Indeed, the name given to the play seems to be a kind of apology for the meanness of the plot.

CHAPTER VIII.

1785—1786.

Drury Lane. — Mrs. Jordan appears in Miss Peggy, in The Country Girl. — Bannister in Belville. — Observations on the Comedy, altered by Garrick and by Lee from Wycherley's Country Wife. — Twelfth Night. — Bannister in Sebastian. —Cobb's Strangers at Home. — Lawrence, by Bannister.—The Virgin Unmasked.—Bannister in Coupée, a dancing-master.— He plays Lucio, in Measure for Measure,—Chatillon in King John, — one of the Brothers in Comus. — The Heiress, a Comedy, by General Burgoyne,—its excellence and universal popularity,— perfection of the Actors.—Bannister in Blandish. — Observations on a supposed plagiarism. — Mrs. Inchbald's observations on the author.—Haymarket.—The Widow's Vow. Bannister plays the Marquis,—Paul Warmans in the Disbanded Officer.—O'Keeffe's Siege of Curzola.—The Walking Statue, and the Minor, for his benefit;—he acts for the first time the three characters, Shift, Smirk, and Mother Cole.—Ridicule of Mr. Whitfield in the epilogue.—Observations on the piece.

COMEDY, which had been for some time disregarded at Drury Lane, was in the next season restored to its due consideration by the talent and popularity of Mrs. Jordan, to whom Bannister was a powerful auxiliary. In Mrs. Jordan were combined all the qualities requisite to the formation of

a comic actress in the sprightly, animated, joyous, romping style, with full power to embody genuine feeling, and send a warm or generous sentiment home to the heart. Her face, if not exactly beautiful, was irresistibly agreeable; her person and gait elegant and elastic; her voice, in singing, perfectly sweet and melodious, and, in speaking, clear and impressive; her enunciation, whether she spoke or sung, always gave full effect to the words she had to deliver; her pronunciation was peculiarly elegant and correct; and she retained some accents of her native Ireland, which, far from impairing, enhanced the richness of her tones, and the simplicity of her expression. The higher department of polite comedy was so well filled by Miss Farren, that Mrs. Jordan, if she had presented herself with that intent, could not have intruded on her precinct; but the range which was left open was ample and popular, and she added to her other means of engaging public favour a peculiar ease, beauty, and grace when in male attire.

Her first appearance was (18th Oct.) as Miss Peggy, in "The Country Girl;" and she instantly established a reputation which time and experience enabled her to increase and extend, but which she never impaired or diminished. Bannister played Belville, the lover of this interesting compound of simplicity and cunning, of innocence and archness: the part contained little beside the frank and ge-

nuine display of an honest passion, promoted by a little artifice; but it brought him on the stage in union with Mrs. Jordan, and their subsequent performances established and augmented the popularity of both.

Criticism has expended some of its rage on the structure of this comedy by Garrick. It is taken from Wycherley's "Country Wife," a play so gross and disgusting in its licentiousness, that we can hardly suppose it to have been well received even in the libertine age of Charles the Second. Yet it was not less true of the play-writer than of the sovereign, that "they who wanted grace, ne'er wanted wit;" and there were many scenes, situations, and characters in "The Country Wife," which well merited transplantation. Lee, father of the lady who wrote "The Chapter of Accidents," made, in 1765, an unsuccessful attempt to revive Wycherley's play, by reducing it to two acts, without changing the name. Mr. Garrick, soon after his return from Italy, produced the comedy nearly as it is now performed; but, instead of making the principal female character a married woman who abandons herself to a licentious adventurer, he makes her an uneducated ward, imposed upon by her guardian, an artful, veteran, decayed debauchee, so much as to suppose that she is married to him by contract, although the ceremony has not passed; yielding to him through ignorance,

becoming more enlightened through love, and cheating him through his overweening confidence in his own wisdom, and his extravagant reliance on her folly. The comedy is sustained by sprightly dialogue; the character of Moody is infinitely superior to its prototype, Pinchwife; and on the whole, if this play falls far short of perfection, yet, considering how much in plot, incident, and character has been retained and judiciously altered, how much deservedly rejected, no small praise is due to the chymist who could extract so sweet an odour from so filthy a reek.

Bannister's next appearance with Mrs. Jordan was (11th Nov.) as Sebastian in "Twelfth Night." The annals of the drama present few instances which equal, not one that surpasses, the perfect manner in which the characters in the play were filled. Bensley's solemn deportment and ludicrous gullibility in Malvolio; Dodd's inimitable fatuity in Sir Andrew; Palmer's gay sensuality, while he practises on the poor simpleton who puts himself under his guidance; Suett's medley of simplicity, archness, and knavery, in the Clown; the beautiful innocence, not unmixed with the lofty firmness of a noble lady, displayed in Olivia, by Mrs. Crouch; and the buoyant spirit, oppressed by the deep sensibilities of love and grief, represented in Viola, by Mrs. Jordan, formed an assemblage of dramatic beauty on which recollection must ever dwell with delight. Bannister was well

worthy to group in this exquisite picture. All of feeling, generosity, and spirited resentment, that was required in Sebastian, he exhibited in full force; and his personation had the additional advantage, that his youth and general appearance made it not impossible that he should be mistaken for his sister Viola: if a closer resemblance were required, all plots turning on such a circumstance must be banished from the stage. It is impossible to take leave of this comedy without bringing to mind the exquisite midnight revel of Sir Toby, Sir Andrew, and the Clown. It is written with all the author's masterly force and discrimination: and the gambols of the Clown; the piteous helplessness of Dodd, the true personation of "ignorance made drunk;" and the wild jollity of Sir Toby, shown in discourse, song, and dance, his contempt of his niece's censure, and his slightly disclosed affection for her waiting-woman, were all in the highest degree perfect. The character of Sir Toby was justly viewed and ably discriminated by Palmer. Considering how much it is deformed by debauchery, and disgraced by dishonesty, an injudicious actor would have shown him as a mere vulgar drunkard and beggarly swindler; but Palmer, not affecting to conceal the grossness and meanness which tarnished the better parts of Sir Toby's character, did not fail to show that residue of gentlemanlike spirit and manly feeling

which rescues the knight from contempt or abhorrence,—as where he resents, with lofty indignation, the intrusive censure of Malvolio, and draws his sword in defence of the poor little idiot who has no other protector.

Mr. Cobb produced (8th December) a comic opera in three acts, called "The Strangers at Home." His chief aim was to exhibit Mrs. Jordan in a spirited character in a man's dress; and, without much claim to originality or wit, he succeeded. The plot turns on the embarrassments occasioned by the unexpected return to Florence of some redeemed captives from Algiers, by which several projects of love and avarice are disappointed. Bannister was Lawrence, one of these emancipated slaves; he has no trouble in reinstating himself as the husband of a good-humoured, sprightly, and faithful wife. The prominent points in his character are a ravenous hunger on his first arrival, and a profuse indemnity which he allowed himself for the strict abstinence from wine to which his Turkish taskmasters had condemned him. This opera was played about fifteen times during the season, when it sunk, but not "to rise no more," for it was re-produced many years afterward, with little change in the plot, but with the characters new-christened, under the name of "Native Land;" but its vital principle was too frail to give it a permanent existence.

A character in broad farce, in which Bannister obtained perfect success, greatly advanced his reputation, and, in some degree, contributed to guide his future course. To afford scope to the playful powers of Mrs. Jordan, Harry Fielding's "Virgin Unmasked; or, An Old Man Taught Wisdom," was brought on the stage. Her playing gave this trifling piece an unwonted popularity; and a childish ballad which she introduced of T, i, m, o, t, h, y, becoming universally a favourite, was croaked and squalled by hundreds who could no more appreciate, than they could rival, the exquisite simplicity, grace, and taste by which she rendered it attractive. The idea, for it can hardly be called a plot, is, that an old man, having a young, lively, and uninstructed daughter, determines to bestow her and his wealth on the one of his poor relatives whom she shall prefer, but neither of whom she had ever seen. She is thus, as the horse-jockeys term it, "trotted out," alternately, to an apothecary, a dancing, and a singing master; but at last cuts the Gordian knot by eloping with her father's footman. Bannister played Coupée, the dancing master, and throughout the performance gained as much applause as the enchantress herself. His animated levity, the lightness of his dance, the drollery of his mock fight, and even the peculiarity of his dress—all of green satin,—gave infinite delight. The farce fully succeeded; and was often, and for many seasons, reproduced.

Beside those which he played in conjunction with Mrs. Jordan, Bannister appeared in many new characters. When Mrs. Siddons gave the importance of her name and talent to Isabella in "Measure for Measure," he succeeded Lee Lewes in Lucio; this vain, empty, presumptuous, babbling fop, or, as he is called by the editors, this "phantastic," is sufficiently busy in the play to make his impertinencies worthy of observation, and his exposure a subject of satisfaction; but there is no peculiar quality in such a "water-fly" to invite particular observation. When she appeared as the Lady Constance in "King John," Bannister filled the short but animated part of Chatillon, the French ambassador; and he was one of the Brothers, when (15th May 1786) she assumed the character of the Lady in "Comus," convincing the public that she was not less capable of giving effect to the poetry of Milton, than to that of Shakspeare, and every other dramatist whose works she had dignified by her recitation.

Without recapitulating all the characters, new to him, in which Bannister appeared, it may be observed, that they were sufficient, in number and importance, to show that his powers were matured and appreciated.

One play demands particular attention; it is General Burgoyne's comedy, "The Heiress,"—the most effective novelty of the season. Its popularity was universal. People of the highest fashion, the

daily associates of the author, were pleased to see their manners represented with spirit and vivacity, their levities and affectations described without caricature, and all their sentiments delivered in dialogue no sentence of which could be reprehended by the most fastidious critic of literature or society. The middle class, as well as the superior, were gratified by the cynical sententiousness of Sir Clement Flint, and interested in the tender woes and delicate embarrassments of Miss Alton. Nor were the gods of the theatre left without a treat adapted to their palate: the insolent, vulgar, *parvenue*, Miss Alscrip; her plebeian father, the pettifogging attorney thrust into fine clothes, catching awkwardly at fashionable vices, and at last detected, disappointed, and humbled; even the French coiffeur, M. Chignon, had his share of favour; and the union of all these characters and circumstances made the comedy the delight of all classes. Yet this admired production soon fell into general disregard, and perhaps a more hopeless effort than its revival could hardly now be devised. In truth, the plot amounts to very little; the dialogue, however appropriate, is never enlivened by wit, or much characterized by humour; all the personages deliver their thoughts in elegant and appropriate language. But to the performers the play owed unmeasured obligations: Smith and Palmer possessed all the requisites of person and manners

for the representation of polite life; the caustic acidity of King gave vigour to a character, otherwise of a very feeble description; Baddeley was inimitable in the display of a vulgar, impudent, French coxcomb; and Parsons—the exquisite, the never-to-be-forgotten Parsons,—not only gave spirit and life to the scenes of embarrassment into which he was led by his presumption and knavery, but imparted some sort of effect to the bad jokes he was condemned to utter; for example, an author must rely very much on the popularity and powers of a player, when he condemns him to say, "My daughter maintains that all fashions are founded on *sense*;—Icod! the tightness of my wig and stiffness of my cape give me the *sense* of the pillory!"

In the female characters, every actress shone. The vulgar presumption and affectation of the pert, low-born, ill-bred Miss Alscrip were nature itself in the delineation of Miss Pope. Mrs. Crouch, then in the flower of her youth, and the full display of her unrivalled and untarnished charms, gave to Miss Alton an exquisite and tender interest, deeply felt by the audience. But above all, and to such a degree as to attract the separate thanks of the author, Miss Farren displayed her characteristic excellencies in Lady Emily Gayville. Whether high and honourable sentiments, burning and virtuous sensibility, sincere and uncontrollable affection, ani-

mated though sportive reprehension, elegant *persiflage*, or arch and pointed satire, were the aim of the author, Miss Farren amply filled out his thought; and by her exquisite representation made it, even when faint and feeble in itself, striking and forcible. Add to these, the irresistible graces of her address and manner, the polished beauties of her action and gait, and all the indescribable little charms which give fascination to the woman of birth and fashion, and the power and influence of Miss Farren's performance may in some degree be appreciated.

Bannister had a part assigned to him in the original cast of this comedy; he played it with his accustomed skill, care, and judgment; but it was unworthy of him. He exhibited a dirty sycophant, who, by the aid of his sister, a bird of the same nest, gets introduced to persons of wealth and quality, in order to take advantage of their good-nature and indiscretion; to fleece ladies of their pin-money at picquet and backgammon, or to gain from gentlemen such benefits as may be derived from misplaced confidence or juvenile indiscretion. Miss Blandish, the sister, is a maker of phrases; she writes bombast, and assigns descriptive epithets. Blandish, on the contrary, affects a severe, but not too sturdy virtue; he feels what is wrong, but gives up his scruples at the call of friendship. In devising this character, the General appears to have

intended for Mr. Blandish a more extended share in the piece than he afterward permitted him to fill. An intimation is given of his ambitious designs on Lady Emily, and his avaricious views on Miss Alscrip; but he does nothing to forward either, and all his operations on Lord Gayville are limited to a few sentences, which bear not in the slightest degree on the subsequent events. The name of Bannister in the bill, was of much more importance than the character of Blandish in the play.

Some well-meant criticism appears to have been thrown away upon a speech of Lord Gayville, concerning Miss Alton, "When she was formed, Nature broke the mould." The author excuses himself by saying that the thought may have been copied from Rousseau, that invention may easily be deceived, and quotes Mr. Sheridan in apology for unconscious plagiarism. In truth, it was not worth while to contest the point. The expression had been used by Ariosto in the tenth book of "Orlando Furioso," then recently translated by Mr. Hoole:

> "*Natura il fece, e poi ruppe le stampa.*"
> "For Nature made him, and destroyed the mould."

It had been introduced by Smollet in the novel of "Sir Launcelot Greaves," and not a little ridiculed by Fielding in a note on "Tom Thumb," act ii. scene 6. With all these instances before him, the author need not have fled to Rousseau to account for his pla-

giarism, but might rather have apologised for vamping up a piece of bombast so stale and so threadbare.

In preparing for the press that collection of altered and mutilated plays which (for some reason known perhaps to themselves) the booksellers have called "The British Drama," Mrs. Inchbald gave, in a preface to this comedy, some account of the author; of whom she says, with a little witty feminine spite, but with undeniable truth, that he was "a man capable of performing all things that did not require absolute genius. He was complete in mediocrity; a valiant, but not always a skilful soldier; an elegant, but sometimes an insipid writer. He sent," she says, "a most pathetic account, from America, of the surrender of his whole army; it was correctly written, and the style charmed every reader: but he had better have beaten the enemy, and mis-spelt every word of his despatch; for so, probably, the great Duke of Marlborough would have done, both by the one and the other."

At the Haymarket, the first original character which Bannister performed was the Marquis, in a farce by Mrs. Inchbald, called "The Widow's Vow," taken, as she confesses, from "*L'Heureuse Erreur*" of M. Patrat. The subject had been attempted in Dublin, and well received; and Mr. Colman, considering Mrs. Inchbald's as a farce which could not

fail, interested himself warmly in its success. It was put in rehearsal as soon as the theatre opened (9th June), and produced on the 20th with great applause. The subject is that of a young widow, who, having made an oath (at Highgate perhaps, or some place where oaths are equally binding, for the scene is in Spain,) never to change her state, fortifies it by resolving to avoid altogether the dangerous society of the other sex. Her friend Donna Isabella, justly thinking that such a vow will be "more honour'd in the breach than in th' observance," gets it intimated to the fair widow that she is coming in man's clothes to visit her, and to make an experiment on the permanence of her resolution. The widow, fearless of any consequence from the addresses of one of her own sex, however attired, receives her guest, who is not Donna Isabella, but her brother the Marquis: her icy resolution is thawed by the time the discovery is made; and the conclusion, as might be expected, is her union with the lover who has pretended such a disguise. In this character Bannister displayed much skill, giving full effect to all the humorous situations in which it placed him, and rendering the denouement not less agreeable to the audience, than it could be supposed to the parties immediately concerned. The farce has been well received by modern audiences under the name of "Brother and Sister."

His next new character was that of Paul Warmans in "The Disbanded Officer; or, The Baroness of Bruchsal," a comedy, translated or adapted by Mr. Johnstone from the German of Lessing. Colonel Holberg a high-spirited and meritorious officer, whose regiment is disbanded, and his just dues withheld, is reduced to great pecuniary embarrassment. He is driven from his apartment at an hotel by an insolent landlord, admirably played by Baddeley; but renounces an alliance with a titled and wealthy lady, from a high feeling of manly pride. His serjeant-major, Paul, adheres to him in all his misfortunes with firm and unshaken fidelity, obeys all his commands, resents all affronts offered to him, and, with hearty disinterestedness, insists on offering his own savings to relieve the necessities of his master. The stern refusal of this act of generosity by the Colonel, produced one night a ludicrous incident in the representation. Honest Warmans, irritated at the rejection of his affectionate tribute, dashed his well-stuffed canvass bag down on the stage: it burst, and disclosed to the eye of the spectator, (oh! how unlike the bursting bag of the patriot in the days of William the Third,) not gold or silver, or even the coloured currency of the theatres, but oyster-shells, pebbles, and divers species of worthless rubbish. Luckily, the piece was established: had it been the first night of representation, the consequence might

have been awful. Bannister's part was admirably suited to his talent; warm affection and dutiful assiduity tempering a bluntness of manner which otherwise might have been termed rugged. The denouement may easily be imagined; the beautiful Baroness, admirably portrayed by Miss Farren, vanquishes, by the help of a little artifice, the scruples of her too sensitive lover. The King (of Prussia) does justice to his claims, and the piece concludes with rapture to the lovers and satisfaction to all parties; not least to that of honest Paul, who, in addition to other marks of grateful acknowledgment, receives the usual dramatic reward, the hand of Lisetta, the Baroness's waiting-woman.

Stimulated probably by Bannister's success in Parolles, O'Keeffe penned for him a character of similar description, in "The Siege of Curzola." The opera was written, as the author informs us, for the purpose of producing Signora Sestini and Edwin in a prominent view. Bannister represented a shallow, cowardly braggadocio, and, like Parolles, was detected and disgraced. His character is well hit off in one quibble, "Ay, ay," he says, "Pompeio and I were always too fool-hardy."—"No, sir," is the answer, "you divided it between you: he was hardy:—" No more need be said of this piece, which could only be dragged into an existence of six or seven nights, and is not printed among the works of its author.

For his benefit (25th July) Bannister revived an extravagant farce, called "The Walking Statue; or, The Devil in the Wine-cellar," written early in the century by Aaron Hill. He performed the principal character, who, having been received into the house of an old virtuoso as a statue, produces some confusion and much merriment by being sometimes a man, sometimes an image, but always where he is not wished for, except when he is forwarding the love intrigues, for which his ingenuity is employed. It is said, and perhaps justly, that to introduce a living man as a statue, is to draw strongly on public credulity; but much may be allowed in a broad farce, and the experiment has recently been repeated in Paris, with great success, in "L'Homme Automate."

On this occasion, Bannister, for the first time, played three characters in "The Minor." He had often before appeared in Shift and Smirk, but now he added Mother Cole; an attempt which he probably would have made earlier, but that the part was in the list of his father. Foote's farce of "The Minor" is now fallen, practically, into complete oblivion. No manager, in these days, would think worth while to exhibit the auctioneer who, after a long discussion on the form of a wig he was to wear, decides at last in favour of a major; or the lady housekeeper who, in her better days, could earn thirty shillings a day by her own dry drinking. Nobody now would

care for the adventurer who was turned out of the room at a city feast for singing "Room for cuckolds, like a parrot, because it was a reflection on the whole corporation;" or for the vulgar gambler or the thoughtless spendthrift, whose tricks and follies form the main operation of the farce: and Mother Cole, in the exercise of her odious and infamous profession, would now scarcely be tolerated. This piece only shares the fortune of many other productions of its author,—of enjoying high popularity for a time, and then completely falling into neglect. The reason is obvious: it is not a comedy, a general picture of life and manners; but a series of caricature portraits, incapable of imparting much interest when the parties satirized and the admirable caricaturist are personally forgotten. When first "The Minor" was produced, the author played the principal parts. In the person of Smirk he portrayed a fashionable auctioneer, whose name was Langford. Mother Cole stood for an infamous woman called Mother Douglas. The supposition that she became a Methodist, gave Foote an opportunity of introducing, in a witty epilogue, the person, manner, and style of the renowned Mr. Whitfield. During the run of "The Minor," this gentleman died; and when the audience, greedy for their usual favourite dish, called out for Dr. Squintum, the player, to his honour, declared himself incapable of holding up the dead to

ridicule. But the grave, which had closed upon the divine, awaited also the auctioneer, the procuress, and the player; and soon after them it was to be expected that the farce would also die and be buried.

Yet, whatever might be the case with Squintum, there was something of a nature more general, although not absolutely so, in the characters of Smirk and Mother Cole. After the death of Foote, his friend and cherished pupil, Charles Bannister, had for some time kept Shift, Smirk, and Mother Cole fresh before the eye of the public. They now devolved on his son, who, in Shift, portrayed with humorous exactness the devices of a low-born hungry adventurer, raised from the employment of a link-boy to the station of a clever young man about town, whose song-singing, mimicry, buffoonery, and other talents were to procure him a glorious harvest of good dinners and pecuniary remuneration. Bannister, in this part, was spirited, lively, and beggarly. Smirk, except as a personal portrait, affords but small scope for the actor: he told with great whim and drollery his first appearance in the pulpit, the debate on the form of wig he was to wear, his bombastic eulogy on the picture, the applause of the lady of quality, and the immediate advancement of the lot; but where little is contained, not much could be extracted, and they who had not known Langford, could take no great interest in Smirk.

Mother Cole is a character of a far superior description. She has not those general characteristics which would enable her to descend to all times, hand in hand with her predecessor, Nell Quickly; but there is in her quite sufficient to excite curiosity, and retain the consequent interest: a compound of corporeal infirmity and mental degradation; superstitious, voluptuous, avaricious, and tenacious even of the infamous reputation proceeding from her former exploits. All the features of this personage were admirably delineated by Bannister. Among these, her superstitious hypocrisy was the most prominent; and rigid indeed must those muscles have been which did not spread out into a broad laugh at the mixture of mental turpitude with professed trading integrity, denoted in some well-known passages of her part. The screams of bodily, and the moans of mental anguish, the chuckling exultation in memory of former wickedness, and the desponding reflection that time had prevented the possibility of the revival of past delights,—all these were given with irresistible vigour and unvarying success. By-the-bye, I do not suppose Foote intended paying a compliment to the Romish priesthood; but their severity toward this mock penitent forms an advantageous contrast to the facility with which, upon any terms, Dr. Squintum was ready to receive a tainted and unwashed sheep into his fold. "Would you believe it, Mr. Loader?" she

says; "the bald-pated, barefooted beggars would not give me absolution, unless I quitted my business!" Assuredly, if man can hope to derive any benefit from a pardon of his sins pronounced by his fellow-creature, it can only be on the condition of truly renouncing them; and the priest, bald-pated, barefooted, and beggarly as he might be, did himself great honour by his firm adherence to so obvious a Christian principle.

I once saw Charles Bannister play Mother Cole when his son performed Shift and Smirk; but not more, perhaps, on account of the necessary mortality implied in its structure, than of the loss of that talent which gave it an extended vitality, "The Minor," although the dialogue abounds with wit and humour, has not in recent times been produced on the stage.

CHAPTER IX.

1786—1787.

Bannister's position in the theatre now perfectly settled.—He has still a predilection for tragedy,—plays several new characters;—observations on this subject.—A cultivation of talent for tragedy useful to a comic performer.—Bannister performs singing characters, and in them acquires reputation.—He plays Don Sebastian in The School for Greybeards.—Harlequin's Invasion.—The First Floor.—Bannister, Tim Tartlett,—Dicky Dash in Box Lobby Loungers,—Leah Ephraim in The Jew's Courtship,—and eight characters in Transformation.—The Royalty Theatre,—its origin,—its situation,—apparent acquiescence of the Managers misconstrued;—the law on this subject.—Burlettas and Pantomimes performed.—Charles Bannister adheres to Palmer.—Other performers.—Mrs. Gibbs.—Master Braham.—Feeling of the Public.—Informations laid.—Publication by the Managers.—Haymarket Theatre.—Mr. Browne.—Stephen Kemble.—Mrs. S. Kemble.—The Country Attorney.—The Slave Trade.—Inkle and Yarico,—origin of the story.—Ligon.—Sir Richard Steele.—Story of the Opera.—Bannister in Inkle,—and afterwards in Trudge.—He plays Count Almaviva in The Spanish Barber,—and in The Follies of a Day.—Observations on Le Barbier de Seville.—Altered state of France.—Production of La Folle Journée,—it is brought to England by Holcroft,—played with success,—abridged.—Anecdote of Miss Farren.—English Readings, a farce.—The Village Lawyer,—its origin,—and complete success.

At this period, Bannister's dramatic character was entirely fixed; his powers were known to the

public, and deservedly appreciated. He appears still to have retained a hankering after tragedy; for, in the season on which we are about entering, he played Chamont in "The Orphan," Theodore in "The Count of Narbonne," and George Barnwell. In these efforts, it cannot be said that he showed a deficiency of talent; but audiences were accustomed to associate with his appearance comic expectations, and in general, whenever he essayed pauses, starts, and attitudes, Dick or Don Ferolo rushed into the mind. These observations do not apply to the domestic drama of George Barnwell; that part he long and frequently filled with high approbation and happy effect.

Altogether, his tragic labours were not absolutely wasted; his attainments in that line matured into a series of characters in which a deep impression was to be made on the feelings by means from which comedy was not banished, in parts where emotion was to be awakened by blunt and genuine nature, true integrity, and by the exhibition of spontaneous sensibility. Had Bannister never contemplated the walk of tragedy, La Gloire, Sadi, and Walter would never have possessed the great charms with which he adorned them. It is evident that a man may play Scrub the better for having studied Abel Drugger; but not so obvious, although not less true, that he may in both attain greater success for having

measured in his mind, or attempted on the boards, some parts of the highest order in genteel comedy, or even the sublime effusions of the sister muse. Who knows that in the hand of Garrick, the story told by Abel Drugger of his malady, occasioned by an indigestible meal, after a shooting party, cured for two-pence by an old woman with sodden ale, and a little pellitory o' th' wall, might not derive some additional effect from the skill which could effectually narrate the progress of Othello's love, or follow out the musings of the melancholy Jaques? No man can know by general anticipation the moment at which, even in the most ludicrous comic part, a single inflection of the voice, the forcible enunciation of a word, or a slight change in the gesture or deportment, will, by a sudden appeal to the natural affections, give life and effect to passages which would otherwise fall still-born and senseless.

It is not to be inferred, from these observations, that low comedy ought to be tragedy in disguise; to possess the perfection of art, does not denote a necessity for wearing it threadbare. It used to be said, that he who could perfectly dance the *menuet de la cour* could do everything well in society that becomes a gentleman; but no man was expected, on common occasions, to take off his hat, to bow, to advance, recede, or present his hand, as if he were performing that dance; it was to be studied for the

sake of crowning all acts with the perfection of grace: and, in like manner, the player who wishes to attain the highest station in any department of his art, should make himself in a considerable degree conversant with all.

Whether from a conviction of his not having a first-rate voice, or from awe of his father's reputation as a singer, Bannister had not until the last season accepted a character in which he was to sing; but in "The Strangers at Home," he gave a comic ditty while drunk, beginning "Though I can't walk quite straight:" it was received with applause; and from this time he always, when required, played vocal parts, and arrived at the reputation of one of our best comic singers; a circumstance which, when he appeared on the stage with Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Bland, Signora Storace, or Miss De Camp, he found of the highest importance. If he was not profoundly skilled in the musical art, he possessed, in Mrs. Bannister, the most able, the most interesting, and the kindest of instructors.

In this season, his first new character was that of Don Sebastian, in "The School for Greybeards," a comedy by Mrs. Cowley, purloined, it is said, in a considerable degree, from "The Lucky Chances" of Afra Behn. It would appear to a crown lawyer that an indictment for the larceny must fail, for the property stolen is of no value. Some opposition was

offered on the first night, but the piece attained the ninth, and then died of pure dramatic senility: no audience was sufficiently cruel to put it to death; no manager has been sufficiently venturesome to attempt its reproduction.

"Harlequin's Invasion" was revived as a holiday treat (29th December), to give the rising generation an experimental acquaintance with the humour which had delighted their fathers. Speaking Harlequins seem now to be banished from the English stage. Bannister played the motley and talkative hero in this piece, enlivening the dialogue with all the fun and humour of which it was capable, and exhibiting in their utmost perfection the attitudes, the gestures, the contortions, and the ludicrous play of the head and limbs, appropriate to this dramatic anomaly. But if the chief, not the only pleasure in the performance was derived from Harlequin; Corporal Bounce, the three judges transformed into old women, and, above all, Dolly Snip, contribute their full proportion: Dolly Snip, still performed by her whom Churchill did not disdain to celebrate in the part,—by the exquisite, the incomparable Miss Pope. The subject of the pantomime is the invasion of the domain of Shakspeare by the motley and heterogeneous troops of Harlequin; they are of course defeated: but we live to see the defeated but not discomfited band return every

Christmas, and interrupt the sway, if they cannot destroy the authority, of the legitimate monarch.

Cobb produced a farce (13th January) called "The First Floor," which, neither in itself nor in its prologue, was so happy as "The Humorist," but yet had tolerable success. Mrs. Pattypan, a pastry-cook, represented by that admirable actress, Mrs. Hopkins, has cast what Win Jenkins calls "hyes of infection" on her apprentice, Tim Tartlett. She has also a rakish lodger in her first floor, whom she vainly endeavours to expel. Many mistakes and whimsical incidents arise; to the fun of which, Bannister, as Tim, contributes his full share. At length he consents to become a regular man of business, and changes his indentures for a marriage licence, to the great contentment of his mistress.

Of the remaining novelties in which Bannister appeared during this season, little notice is required. The prevailing fancy of turning into ridicule the low-bred coxcombs who made themselves a nuisance in the theatres, supplied him with the part of Dicky Dash, in an ephemeral farce, called "Box-Lobby Loungers." For the benefit of Baddeley, he appeared as Leah Ephraim, in a thing called "Jew's Courtship;" and, for his own, he acted eight characters in a sort of scenic dialogue, called "Transformation; or, The Manager an Actor in spite of himself." The thought is derived from a French piece, called

" *L' Intendant Acteur malgré lui.* It supposes a nobleman, or country gentleman, disposed to recreate his neighbours with a dramatic entertainment; but his rigid steward protests against, and sternly opposes, all such exhibitions. To correct his folly, it is contrived that, in a garden, he shall be successively accosted by, and enter into discussions with, a waiter from the inn, a hair-dresser, a musician, the machinist, the woman dresser from the intended theatrical company, a poet, and a publican. All these personages were played, with great versatility and readiness, by Bannister; and, in the end, the sullen steward is informed that his master and his friends have been lying *perdu* all the time, and have enjoyed with infinite delight the exhibition of a comedy in which he was an actor in spite of himself. This being long before the appearance of Mathews, the facility of change, and correctness of personation, at that time unrivalled, occasioned no less surprise than delight. Bannister introduced the piece with a prologue, the humour of which, if it had any, consisted in making every line end in *ation.* Such an essay was neither new nor worth the labour it cost, even although it served to introduce a compliment to Mr. Tickell's admirable pamphlet, " Anticipation."

A new attempt, which was made this summer in the eastern part of the metropolis, occasioned no small agitation among the proprietors and perform-

ers at the patent and licensed theatres, and much divided the opinions of the public. It seems to have occurred, or been suggested, to the Lieutenant-governor of the Tower, that the district called the Tower Hamlets was in itself a royalty, and that in right of his office, he possessed, in that region, prerogatives similar to those exercised by the King at Westminster, and in other places where his residence was fixed. Before a principle so novel and so hazardous was acted upon, it would have become all parties to inform themselves, by the best legal advice, of the security of the measures intended to be taken. No such precaution was resorted to: the Deputy Lieutenant-governor, with inconsiderate good-nature,—for nothing more can be imputed to him,—gave his sanction; and Mr. Palmer, animated with the hopes of wealth and renown, disbursed all the property he had, and exhausted all the credit he could command, in erecting a new play-house, which received the name of the Royalty Theatre.

It is not easy to imagine a situation in the metropolis more exceptionable than that which he selected. Remote from the West end of the town, not nearer to the respectable parts of the city than Drury Lane or Covent Garden, inconvenient and mean in all its approaches, and fixed among the low traffickers of Rosemary Lane, and the miserable and vicious population of Saltpetre Bank, it seemed to afford no pro-

spect of ever becoming a place which even persons of a decent class would frequent. Curiosity might attract them for a season, but a permanent patronage could not be expected.

In all his proceedings Mr. Palmer appeared to conduct himself with manliness and candour. His intentions were fully disclosed to the proprietors of the winter theatres; and the manager of the Haymarket, if he did not write, at least permitted Palmer to speak an address, in which were the lines:

> "Still to improve, and still to please, his care,
> At Drury, Haymarket, or Well-close Square."

In answer to the argument to be drawn from this apparent acquiescence, the managers alleged that they had been deceived by assertions adapted to the interest of each party,—that the new undertaking was intended only for a winter, or only for a summer theatre. But when it was understood that both portions of the year would be claimed by Mr. Palmer, and that engagements were offered to many of their best performers, they became alarmed, and publicly announced their determination to protect their property by the means which the law afforded.

That the exhibition of dramatic pieces was most distinctly prohibited by the statute of 10 George I, no one who perused it in the most cursory manner could doubt; and the Vagrant Act, 17 George II, then in force, gave a summary power of imprison-

ment to the justice of the peace before whom any performer should be brought as an offender against the law.

Assured, not only by general opinion, but by that of Mr. Bearcroft, one of the most eminent and profound lawyers of the day, that neither the Deputy Lieutenant's licence, nor that granted by the magistrates of the Tower Hamlets division, would protect him, the new manager opened his house on the 20th of June, 1787, with "As you like it," and "Miss in her teens;" and, that he might not be deemed to have acted "for hire, gain, or reward," dedicated the whole receipts of the night, that is, the produce of a completely crowded house, to the funds of the London hospital. Whether this subterfuge would have been availing, or not, was never tried; for as Palmer, at the end of the entertainment, announced his intention no longer to perform the regular drama, no prosecution was commenced.

In this most irregular attempt Palmer is said to have been stimulated by a Dr. Jackson, a man on whom no reasoning being, acquainted with the town, could have been supposed to rely. For legal advice and literary assistance, both on the stage and in the press, he looked up to a much better supporter, Arthur Murphy. Aided by his pen, and relying on the music licence granted by the magistrates, he opened again, after a short time, with pantomimes,

burlettas, and songs. Many, who had listened to his offers before the danger was certain, now receded from their engagements; but his old friend Charles Bannister adhered to him with manly firmness and immovable constancy. His season too was adorned by other performers of considerable merit; Mrs. Gibbs, in the buoyancy of her youth, and the most alluring period of her acknowledged beauty; Delpini, the prince of pantomimic clowns; Arrowsmith, a favoured singer from Vauxhall, aided him every night; but, above all, Master Braham, a youth of very early years, announced as a pupil of Mr. Leoni, proved a powerful attraction. To this extraordinary performer it has been given to acquire, and richly to deserve, during the long term of half a century, a constant and undiminished popularity, derived from his continued excellence in every department of his art; in sacred music, in the concert-room, on the Italian, and most, for there he was most seen, on the English stage.

As the public, in their dramatic pursuits at least, are intent chiefly on present gratification, they have no great respect for property founded on patent or charter alone, savouring of monopoly, and sustained by penalties, the cause of the Royalty Theatre became highly popular; and in the performances frequent allusion was made to the hardships under which the proprietors and the actors were supposed

to labour. Palmer lamented, in a prologue, his restricted condition:

"Should I from Shakspeare but a scene retail,
A moral sentence drags me to a gaol."

And, in a scene representing a vocal club, Bannister bore a conspicuous part in a glee, to this effect:

"Come come, my boys, let's sing a catch.

Other voices.—A match,
A match.

One voice.—Beware of catchpoles,
Warrants, and dark-holes.
You're a vagrant;—'tis a fact!

Bannister.—Stop!—stop!—let me look at the act.—(*Having examined the book,*)
I'm a gentleman!—

The one.—I ask your pardon,
You're only such in Covent Garden.

Bannister.—Curse your odious explanation!
Let us sing
'God save the King,'
And be loyal in spite of information."

Still the performances were not so guarded, but that an information was laid against Charles Bannister and some others for playing in entertainments of the stage, contrary to the statute; and the justice, whose name was *Staple*, convicted and committed

them; but another magistrate, most illegally and irregularly, superseded the warrant. This incident occasioned one of Bannister's usual happy puns, which was related with great humour and effect by Lee Lewes, while exhibiting a drunken man in the Lecture on Heads, at the Royalty. "I said a remarkably good thing," exclaimed the drunkard, "better than Charles Bannister said to the justice; —perhaps you don't know what that was. Why, says his worship, says he, 'Charles, you are a vagabond, and I'll put my padlock upon you.' 'Will you?' said Charles; 'why then I'll knock *out* the *Staple.*'"

The managers of the regular theatres appealed to the public in a very sensible pamphlet, written, it is said, by Colman. It vindicated their conduct; examined what would have been that of Palmer himself, standing in their situation; and declared him to be the dupe of a Viper, that being the nickname fixed on Jackson by Foote, in one of his farces. "Had the Wellclose-square scheme," the pamphleteer observed, "been suffered to rear its head, we should, by degrees, have had similar excrescences disgracing the drama in every part of the town; their numbers would have prevented their success; and the ruin of all would have been the consequence." This argument, like many others

founded on good sense and an exact knowledge of the subject, must, at this day, seem to have been a prophecy.

From this digression, which connects itself with the life of Bannister only as a portion of the general history of the stage during his times, and as affording some specimens of the character and conduct of his father, we return to a more particular view of the theatre in which he was personally engaged. Deprived of his first performers in genteel comedy and in opera, the manager of the Haymarket began (18th May) a prosperous season under auspices apparently unfavourable. A gentleman named Browne undertook, without much success, the higher characters in tragedy and comedy. Stephen Kemble, a good actor, but not one of the favourites of the town, lent his aid; but he brought with him a host of strength in his wife, an actress of exquisite ability, who could occupy an extensive range of characters in every department.

At an early period of the season, the performances were intermitted for about a fortnight; and the first novelty produced was a comedy by Cumberland, called "The Country Attorney." Bannister made his greatest efforts to render popular his part, of Jack Volatile; but an ill-imagined plot, forced and improbable incidents, and dialogue showing the author's cleverness, but never cheering the audience

by its wit or humour, weighed down the powers of the actors, and the piece was played only four times. Two years afterward, the author (as it was observed in the phrase of the gaming-table) took a back-hand, and got his piece performed at Covent Garden as "The School for Widows;" but Lewis, Ryder, and Mrs. Abington succeeded no better than the players at the Haymarket: it was endured only three times, and is now withdrawn, not only from our memory, but from our judgment also, for it was never printed under either name.

To revive the drooping fortunes of the house, the younger Colman stepped in. His muse received an impulse from a subject which powerfully swayed the public mind. A benevolent association had been formed for the purpose of extinguishing a commerce which they considered a disgrace to Christianity, and a scourge to the country,—the African slave-trade. This traffic had long been carried on; and was deemed essential to the welfare of the sugar islands, and highly beneficial to the maritime and commercial interests of England. It had many supporters; but when facts came to be disclosed, and opinions investigated, the number of its opponents daily increased. Men of every religious persuasion, the Quakers taking the lead,—and politicians of every rank and denomination, whatever differences they might entertain on other points,—united cordially in

this. The judgment of the great majority of the people accorded with the abolitionists: but, as it is necessary to the gaining of any object by means of activity and perseverance to act upon the feelings and the imagination of men, much industry was used in the diffusion of books, pictures, and medals, and in the promulgation of opinions by sermons, speeches, addresses, and debates; and these efforts were not made in vain.

While such was the state of general feeling, Mr. Colman brought forward his celebrated and successful opera, "Inkle and Yarico." The outline of this story is found in Ligon's "True Exact History of the Island of Barbadoes," published in 1673, in these words: "We had an Indian woman, a slave, in the house, who was of excellent shape and colour, for it was a pure bright bay: this woman would not be wooed, by any means, to wear clothes. She chanced to be with child by a Christian servant; and lodging in the Indian house, amongst other women of her own country, where the Christian servants came, both men and women, and being very great, and that her time was come to be delivered, loath to fall in labour before the men, walked down to a wood in which was a pond of water, and there, by the side of the pond, brought herself a-bed; and, presently washing her child in some of the water of the pond,

lapped it up in such rags as she had begged of the Christians, and, in three hours' time, came home with her child in her arms, a lusty boy, frolick and lively. This Indian strolling near the sea-coast upon the main, an English ship put into a bay, and sent some men ashore to try what victuals or water they could find, for in some distress they were; but the Indians, perceiving them to go so far up into the country as they were sure they could not make a safe retreat, intercepted them in their return, and fell upon them, chasing them into a wood; and, being dispersed there, some were taken, and some killed. But a young man amongst them, straggling from the rest, was met by this Indian maid, who, upon the first sight, fell in love with him, and hid him close from her countrymen (the Indians) in a cave, and there fed him till they could safely go down to the shore, where the ship lay at anchor, expecting the return of their friends; but, at last, seeing them upon the shore, sent the long-boat, took them a-board, and brought them away. But the youth, when he came ashore in the Barbadoes, forgot the kindness of the poor maid, that had ventured her life for his safety, and sold her for a slave, who was as free-born as he. And so poor Yarico, for her love, lost her liberty." The author makes no further mention of Yarico, except to record her dexterity in

extracting the plaguing insects called chigoes from the foot; on which occasion he terms her "the most unfortunate Yarico."

Although not deficient in affecting circumstances, this artless story would probably have engaged little notice, had it not been powerfully placed before the public by Sir Richard Steele in the eleventh number of the Spectator (March 10, 1711). He puts the narrative into the mouth of a lady, as an answer to a shallow wit who has been exhausting his store of common-place abuse against the fair sex, concluding his discourse with the story of the Ephesian matron. The fair and triumphant disputant avows that she derives her narrative from Ligon, and even specifies the page of his book; but a great change is made in the story. By her the name of Inkle is first introduced, and the short description of "a young man straggling from the rest" is amplified into "the third son of an eminent citizen, who had taken particular care to instil into his mind an early love of gain, by making him perfect master of numbers, and consequently giving him a quick view of loss and advantage, and preventing the natural impulses of his passions by prepossession toward his interests. His motives for selling his too confiding *inamorata*, and the horrible circumstance that the child with which she is pregnant is his own, are derived entirely from the inventive faculty of Sir Rich-

ard Steele. The anecdote, thus embellished, is irresistibly attractive and impressive; it was always copied into the works compiled for the instruction of youth, and it formed the subject of a long poem by an author whose name I do not recollect.

On this foundation Colman erected the fable of his drama. A portion of the crew of the Achilles is discovered on the American shore, uneasy at the absence of Inkle and two other passengers,—his uncle, and his clerk or valet, for he serves in both capacities. The name of the ship is curiously retained in this story in all its shapes: in the Achilles Mr. Ligon departed from England; the same name is given by Steele to the vessel which leaves Inkle on shore; and Mr. Colman has not only preserved it, but made it the basis of a quibbling song, sung by the mate and crew. As it is necessary that the plot should be carried on in dialogue, Inkle could not be left alone; and his servant, Trudge, a good-humoured, pert, light-hearted, but generous-minded cockney, is assigned as his companion. This resource was so obvious, that I heard Mr. Thelwall, in a speech at a debating society on the subject of the Royalty theatre, say, that he had written, and presented to the Haymarket manager, a drama on this subject which exhibited a character precisely similar. If this statement was true, the public were probably not less obliged to Mr. Colman for what he suppress-

ed, than for what he produced. Yarico also has a waiting-woman, to whom is given the Polish-sounding name of Wowski. The parties being thus established, the amour rolls on between the two couples, as might be expected, until the fortunate appearance of a ship, which lands them all safely in Barbadoes, soon after the arrival of the Achilles. Colman filled out these meagre materials by introducing, as passengers on board the same vessel, Narcissa, daughter of the governor of Barbadoes, and a Captain Campley, who obtains her affections, and supplants Inkle, her intended husband. When they arrive, the eager haste of Sir Christopher Curry, Narcissa's father, causes, without any intrigue or contrivance, the marriage of the two lovers. The very little that is allotted to Narcissa was exhibited by Mrs. Bannister with her usual elegance, chasteness, and propriety. Yarico derived inexpressible interest from the engaging innocence and deep-toned pathos of Mrs. Stephen Kemble. She was a performer of varied excellency and extensive power. In her hands, the hoyden archness of "The Virgin Unmasked," the generous affection of Sophia in "The Road to Ruin," the heart-rending distress of the confiding and suffering Desdemona, and the love which survived hope, and struggled against ruthless cruelty, in Yarico, were all feelingly and powerfully portrayed.

Inkle was the part assigned to Bannister, and it was well performed: but the genuine traces of the performer were lost; his real powers were buried; he struggled under a load of formality and dulness. To see Bannister playing a character in which his large eye never cast forth a beam of benevolence,—in which his countenance never expanded for a moment to express the impulse of a humane heart, or the incitement of a quaint conceit,—was indeed to see him driven from the fair fields in which Nature had destined him to dwell, amid barren wastes and dreary deserts. To hear him calculating the probable value of uncultivated land on the American continent, and the possible produce of free men "in their native confines hunted down," enslaved and sold in a market, and all this without a syllable of compunction or compassion, and with no more even of self-applause than results from the recollection of his being "the carefullest Co. in the whole city,"—"a steady, sober, solid, good young man, who had acquired the name of prudent Mr. Thomas,"—to hear all this from Bannister, was to suppose a greater change than the general course of dramatic representation implies. In one passage a small portion of his natural feeling broke out; it was when he described his mistress, in her sleep, uttering a blessing on his name, while he was meditating against her an act of the greatest perfidy and cruelty. I

have heard him say, that the thought of Inkle's repentance, which brings the piece to a satisfactory, if an awkward conclusion, was suggested by him. "But, after all," said Colman, "what are we to do with Inkle?" "Oh!" said Bannister, "let him repent;" and so it was settled.

But he was soon enabled to improve his line of character. The death of Edwin made a vacancy in Trudge. The whimsical, light-hearted, honest, and feeling semi-city-gentleman, if not altogether worthy of his powers, at least left them free; and the exercise of them, if not ample, was never painful. In fact, he gave to Trudge as much interest as it would bear. His quaking timidity in danger, his boastful display of courage which he had never possessed, his rueful recollections of the gay delights, not unmixed with supercilious affronts, in Threadneedle Street, afforded true and delicious amusement; while his sturdy resolution not to play the part of a villain, by whatever example it might be graced, stamped on every heart the true impression of his genuine powers.

For his own benefit (7th August), Bannister played Count Almaviva, in the "Spanish Barber;" and for that of his wife the same character in "The Follies of a Day; or, The Marriage of Figaro;" both taken from the French of Caron de Beaumarchais. As these pieces are now chiefly seen at the Opera-

ıouse, and resorted to less for the merit of the ıuthor than for the music of Rossini and Mozart, a ew observations may be offered on them. "Le Barbier de Seville" was the early attempt of a wri-er endowed with great gifts of wit and genius. The intrigue is always animated, amusing, and in-eresting; and the denouement surprising, yet na-ural and satisfactory. Mrs. Bannister, in Rosina, was everything that the part required; and the Doctor Bartholo of Parsons was a vivid and highly comic display of the shifts, the anxieties, the doting, ınd the rage of a cunning, dishonest, and, at the ame time, very silly old guardian, desirous of se-uring the person of his ward, and concealing his ieculations on her fortune. Bannister, as Count Almaviva, ably filled up the plan of the author. Maintaining, until the end of the opera, the disguise of an university student, and not disclosed, until the ast, as a person of the first quality in the Spanish lominions, he interested every one in the success of ıis honourable amour; and the final discovery of his eal rank only gave additional warmth to the hearti-ıess with which all wished his success. The nu-nerous stratagems played off on poor Bartholo, and :he scenes in which the Count himself appears in :ontact with his ridiculous old rival, produce the happiest comic effect. Song is an adjunct to the piece, but by no means its characteristic, or chief

support. In one scene the want of it afforded a happy hit to Edwin, who played Lazarillo. "What, sir!" he said; "cannot you sing a song under the window of Rosina?"—"No," said Bannister, answering as Almaviva.—"That 's very odd," Lazarillo replied; "the old gentleman, your father, sings a very good song." The separation of Charles from his son, by his enterprise in the east, gave a point to this remark which the audience cheered with hearty applause.

When Beaumarchais first derived reputation from this opera, the French appeared to be merely a gay, light-hearted, frivolous people, pursuing pleasure to the extremest confine of folly, and enjoying it with an eagerness which excluded all serious thoughts; but a few years disclosed a very different character. A jealous distrust of all who governed; a dislike, easily exasperated into a hatred, of all who were dignified by rank or station; a contempt for their priestly instructors, founded on sceptical doubt of all revealed truths, and tending to the overthrow of all social sanctions, were eagerly diffused and spreading through all classes. The king, a lover of right, but not sufficiently apprehensive of evil; desirous to preserve social order, but not endowed with the vigour necessary to maintain it, was carried down by the torrent which his virtue would have led him to withstand, but which his

quiescent and passive character did not permit him to resist.

In this state of things, Beaumarchais, now an avowed proselyte of the new system, and editor of the works of the great high-priest of impiety and immorality, Voltaire, produced "La Folle Journée." It is little to say of it, that, in wit and brilliancy of dramatic writing, it far exceeded "Le Barbier de Seville," to which it is a sequel; in those qualities it would be difficult to find its equal in the productions of France or any other nation: but its great strength is derived from a fierce derision of all the institutions, political, religious, and social, then established, and a course of observations and examples calculated to make them odious and despised. At other periods, this piece might have been less dangerous; but, in the ardent state of the public mind which then existed, such a combustible could not be thrown without the utmost danger. When the piece had been presented at Versailles, Louis saw its immoral tendency; and, although unaware of its ulterior mischief, withheld, for some time, his consent from its being performed in the capital: but the solicitations of his court, aided by a little trick and contrivance, at length triumphed over his scruples; and the people of Paris received the high gratification of a play in which rank is degraded by extreme profligacy, conjugal virtue is

shown maintaining an unequal conflict with very slight temptation, justice is exhibited as a sordid and sensual traffic, and the fraud and suppleness of inferior people are made to triumph over the pride and power of their superiors in rank. The plot is not so unskilfully conducted, but that the better class facilitate, by their own vices and follies, the process of their degradation; but the artifice of the dialogue consists in their example being displayed, not as an exception from, but an illustration of, the general state of things. And that the people of Paris, delighted as they were with such an exhibition, might not overlook its application, the moral was summed up in a few lines in the vaudeville :

Or, Messieurs, la comédie
Que l'on juge en cet instant,
Sauf erreur, vous peint la vie
Du bon peuple qui l'entend.
On l'opprime : il jure, il crie,
Il s'agite de mille façons ;
Tout finit par des chansons.

Not more pointed, and scarcely more explicit, was the exclamation used by Marat, some years afterward : " O ! peuple babillard, si tu savois agir!"

It was not intended to commit this comedy to the press until repetition had abated curiosity, and rendered a translation less desirable than it would

be while it was in its full freshness; but, by an uncommon union of industry and perseverance, Mr. Holcroft, assisted by M. Bonneville, a French gentleman, derived from the mouths of the actors a perfect copy, and, while it was still in its first run in Paris, Mr. Harris was enabled to produce a perfect counterpart at Covent Garden. Without entering into a minute analysis, it may be said that the translation was close and exact, without any great sacrifice of the wit and spirit of the original; such changes alone were made as the differing genius of a French and English audience rendered necessary. It was completely successful; nor was it likely, in England, to acquire any influence that could be dangerous to religion, loyalty, or morals.

But a trial before a baronial court in Spain, and some other incidents, which appeared tedious to a British audience, rendered an abridgment necessary, and the comedy was reduced to three acts when it was played at the Haymarket. Mrs. Bannister was the Countess Almaviva, and sustained the part well; but the Count was not one of Bannister's fortunate attempts. The subtile, tricking, profligate, yet jealous husband, actuated by many a vice, but animated by no whim, and without even a spark of honest manliness, was not calculated for his powers; and praise can go no further than to say he performed it correctly.

A curious incident occurred during the performance. Miss Farren, whose grace and charms gave the highest finish to Susan, standing near one of the side-lights, set on fire the mantilla of light gauze which descended from her head to the lowest parts of her dress. Bannister, perceiving the accident, when no one else did, approached without alarming her, enveloped her in his Spanish cloak, and by the pressure of his hands extinguished the flame. Thus his presence of mind prevented great alarm in the elegant actress and her friends, and the thanks he received were liberal and unbounded.

"Transformation" was successfully repeated at Bannister's benefit, and he added a farce called "English Readings." This was a satire levelled at those who, following a fashionable whim, with no more skill than that which, when children, they had acquired from their governesses and early masters while they were "travelling from Christ-cross row to Malachi," undertook to entertain parties by reading select passages from dramatic and epic poets, and from sentimental and humorous writers. To what a height the delight of such an entertainment may be carried, the few who remember the readings of Mr. Henderson, and the many who may recollect those of Mrs. Siddons and Mrs. Bartley, can bear ample testimony; and many more have laboured through painful hours when individuals less qualified have attempted

the same difficult task in public, or when, in select parties, fidgeting in the seats, forced laughs, reluctant bravos, and ill-suppressed yawns, have shown how dearly each individual thought he paid for his tea and muffins, and how sincere was his resolve never again to incur a similar annoyance. In the piece in question, Mr. Bootekin, a shoemaker, who has retired from business to enjoy the fruits of his industry in the country, has a son Bob, or, as Bannister called himself, "Mr. Bootekin jun.," (short, like gun,) who undertakes to entertain the rustics by reading scenes from Shakspeare, leaving out the nonsense; to be droll, at the expense of Swift; and sentimental, on the ruins of Sterne's Maria and dead ass. The fortune of Charlotte, Bob's sister, makes her a desirable match to a half-pay officer; and while Bootekin, jun. is "venting his folly," Captain Wilmot contrives to marry her, although her father refused his consent. The piece was Cobb's; but, except the part of Bannister, too dull for criticism.

One novelty of the season remains to be mentioned, "The Village Lawyer," which was brought out (28th August) for the benefit of Edwin, after having been transmitted anonymously, and having remained a long time unnoticed in the secretaire of the manager. This farce, which may probably with justice be termed the most ancient in existence, is derived from a French piece called

"*L'Avocat Patelin.*" It is frequently mentioned, and its specific incidents—the same which are represented at this day—are referred to by Rabelais in his immortal history of Gargantua. M. Le Duchat, the learned commentator on the work of the old wit, tells us, in a note on the twentieth chapter of the first book, that, from internal evidence, the farce appears to have been written about the year 1470. Early in the sixteenth century, it was printed at Paris. It was translated into Latin, and went through several impressions more or less correct. Who was the translator is doubtful; he called himself Alexander Condibertus, but his real name is supposed to have been Reuchlin. The farce is known on most of the theatres in Europe. The name which would be properly translated "Counsellor Patelin," is not well represented by the "Village Lawyer," for, instead of a barrister, *inopiâ deperditus*, it gives only the idea of a paltry, pettifogging attorney, ready to throw his little community into confusion, so that he could gain the profits of an appeal at the session, or of a trial at the assizes. Parsons and Edwin exerted their powers with the happiest effect in Snarl and Sheepface; the one, a peevish old draper, who is swindled out of a piece of cloth by Scout, and who sees the throats of his sheep cut, that their carcasses may be stolen, by his dishonest shepherd. But the strength of the performance lay

iefly in Bannister, who acted Scout, (Patelin,))wing his richest humour and most animated pow-
. His display of poverty, aggravated by the de-
rate condition of his only coat, which precludes
hope of his ever obtaining a client; the address
th which he wheedles old Snarl out of his cloth;
pretended insanity, when the draper comes to
nand his money; his pretended pleading in the
se of Widdrington against Montgomery; his ap-
rance as counsel for Sheepface before Justice
ttimus; and his final disappointment when his
grateful client, instead of a fee, resorts to the trick
ich Scout had taught him, and pretending to be
nented, instead of speaking like a human being,
's like a sheep,—were all portrayed with faithful
uracy and irresistible vivacity. The hearing be-
e the justice received a high finish from the lu-
rous confusion which Parsons displayed, when
ubting, and yet believing the identity of Scout, he
commixed the narrative of his two wrongs, that
worship could not understand his complaint, and
missed the case. In such hands, and with such
ans of exciting genuine and hearty laughter, it
y easily be conceived that "The Village Law-
" was graciously received, and continued a fa-
urite so long as the original performers, or
ir adequate successors, continued to fill the
ding parts.

CHAPTER X.

1787—1788.

Drury Lane.—The Double-dealer revived.—Observations on the play.—Return of Palmer,—of Charles Bannister to the Haymarket. — Bannister plays Young Fashion, in The Trip to Scarborough. — Observations on that comedy. — Plays Beau Clincher, in The Constant Couple.— Remarks on the characters. —Skirmish, in The Deserter,—Twist, in Love in the East.— 'Tis an ill Wind that blows nobody good. — Bannister plays Lazarillo, in The Spanish Barber.—The Invisible Mistress.— King ceases to be Stage Manager.—Smith retires from the Stage. —Marriage of Mr. Kemble and Mrs. Brereton. — Anecdotes. — Haymarket.—Bannister in Sir David Dunder.—Bombardinian, in Chrononhotonthologos,—excellence of this burlesque tragedy.

At the Haymarket, Bannister had played Melville, in "Vimonda," a tragedy of little merit or reputation, by Mr. M'Donald; and early in the Drury Lane season (10th November 1787), he sustained the character of Lord Melville, in Harriet Lee's "New Peerage," a comedy of no greater pretension or celebrity than M'Donald's tragedy.

Congreve's "Double-dealer," revived, and, so far as an admirable performance of Maskwell could do it, sustained by Mr. Kemble, afforded Bannister an

opportunity of appearing in the character of Brisk. "The Double-dealer" was never well received, or, at least, never a favourite. Writhing under evident disappointment and vexation, the author attempted, in a dedicatory epistle to Mr. Charles Montague, to correct the judgment of the town. As no critic seems to have attacked the play in a direct manner, the author gathered up scattered objections and answered them. He defends soliloquy, that indispensable resource of a dramatist, which a critic of the most moderate capacity would hardly think a subject of censure; he vindicates his hero, Mellefont, from the charge of folly in being a too easy dupe; and excuses, as well as he can, the lax morality of his females: but the faults which create distaste at this comedy, and to which no powers of argument can ever reconcile us, lie much deeper.

The character of Maskwell is that of a villain, drawn with much ingenuity; he always tells the truth, but the effect is always to deceive; he plays with his cards disclosed, yet always cheats those with whom he is engaged: but his pursuits are so base, his course so atrociously wicked, as to exceed the legitimate bounds of comedy, and to leave no means of adequate punishment within the scope of that department of the drama.

Lady Touchwood is a monster, without religion, morality, or modesty; her licentiousness contem-

plates incest, her revenge meditates murder, her profound and unmitigated criminality shocks every feeling allied to decency or humanity; and a miserable defect of justice is felt, when her injured husband, assured of all the extent of her wickedness, dismisses her with nothing more than the exclamation "Go, and thine own infamy pursue thee!"

Lady Froth and Lady Pliant are of low and disgusting depravity, profligate and abandoned, without the apology of passion or the semblance of delicacy or reserve; it is indeed difficult to imagine why the Mrs. Squeamish and Mrs. Dainty Fidget of Wycherley should have been banished from a stage where Lady Froth and Lady Pliant could be permitted to show themselves.

Of Mellefont, a tame, walking-gentleman hero, enough is said in Congreve's apologetical dedication; and Brisk seems to be introduced only to perpetrate a pun, to practise a pirouette, and to plant a pair of horns. The dialogue has the characteristic wit of Congreve, but is thrown away upon a plot in which it creates wonder, free from involuntary praise, to see, in a comedy, so much deep wickedness exhibited in one evening between the hour of dinner and that of repose.

During a great part of the season, the public tolerated rather than enjoyed the performance of

Palmer's best characters by players who, whatever were their general merits, were but unsatisfactory substitutes for an actor so constantly and so justly a favourite. Thus, when they had seen his brother Robert as Joseph Surface, and Moody as Sir Toby Belch, they hailed with rapture the 25th April, which gave them back Palmer in Sir Toby and Young Wilding. His return to the regular boards showed no deficiency in firmness or manly spirit: it was merely yielding to imperious circumstances. Beset with legal difficulties, and by a decision of the Court of King's Bench, that the discharge of Charles Bannister, after he had been committed as a rogue and vagabond, was against law; apprehensive of the issue of renewed informations, and a prisoner in the King's Bench for debt,—he endeavoured to make yet a final struggle, by playing pantomime entertainments, such as "Don Juan" and the "Deserter of Naples," at the Royal Circus, which was within the precinct called the rules of the prison. But by a new regulation, calculated to restrain the inordinate profligacy of confined debtors, who revelled in luxury while defrauding their creditors, the court declared that no place of public entertainment should be considered within the rules; and Palmer, therefore, could no longer appear at the Circus without incurring the disgrace and penal consequences of an escape. Thus prostrated at the

feet of his opponents, he accepted the grace which they offered: he made arrangements with his creditors, and resumed his station at the winter theatre, avoiding, with great judgment, every appearance of abject submission, or the dogged airs of an oppressed hero.

His restoration at the Haymarket was equally prompt and honourable; but Charles Bannister was not so fortunate. At Drury Lane, few operatic pieces were performed in which his assistance could have been available, had the managers been inclined to offer him an engagement; at Covent Garden, Bowden and Darley were put into parts which he either had sustained, or could have played with the greatest satisfaction to the town; but at the Haymarket, in the next season, his abilities were again brought into exercise, and he, who was on all hands allowed to be the best of English singers, was restored to the metropolis which had so long admired and patronized him.

In the absence of Palmer, Bannister played Young Fashion, in "The Trip to Scarborough," a judicious alteration of Sir John Vanbrugh's "Relapse." Many critics have expressed a different opinion; but every one who peruses the two plays, and considers to which he would accompany the females of his family, will have no difficulty in adjudging the preference. The author who exempts himself from the restraints

of morality and decency, both in the conduct and language of his characters, may produce much witty dialogue, beyond the reach of a more cautious cultivator of the dramatic field; but still there is room enough for a luxuriant crop of wit, although the rank growth of immoral poison be eradicated. It is also to be observed, that, in reviving such a comedy as that of Vanbrugh, the author was encumbered with personages that could be fancied, or acknowledged, from a few remaining specimens, but do not appear in the daily intercourse of life. Lord Foppington is a sample of the beau at the beginning of the eighteenth century; but the species had ceased to exist before the time now under consideration, and was much on the decline in 1777, when Sheridan produced his alteration of "The Relapse;" it was a species with which the dandies and exquisites of a subsequent period had no sort of affinity. Dodd, with his diminutive but elegant form, his finished toilette, his glitter of jewellery, his delicate mode of enunciation, and his power of making every action and every gesture represent self-sufficient frivolity, gave an accurate and inimitable notion of this extraordinary race of beings. Sir Tunbelly Clumsy, although not so remote from modern nature, is yet too gross a creature to have been voluntarily selected, much more to have been created, by Sheridan; he found him, and so he continued

him, on the muster-roll. Mrs. Jordan, as his daughter, the joyous, rustic Miss Hoyden, (and to mention the name is to conjure up the idea of the actress,) showed, in all its perfection, that kind of young lady which Voltaire described as peculiar to English comedy, because it was peculiar to English society and manners; the female who, before blue stockings came into fashion, was struggling out of the nursery, without being qualified to appear in the drawing-room; who felt the sentiments and propensities of a woman, without having learnt to discard the petulance, the inconsiderateness, the waywardness, and the self-will of a child: but in manners, at least, Miss Hoyden is now no less antiquated than Sir Tunbelly. Young Fashion, a brother of Lord Foppington, has no particular characteristic; but, as he is oppressed and tyrannized over by his elder brother, his success with the young heiress is a source of theatrical satisfaction.

For Mrs. Jordan's benefit, (2nd May,) Bannister played Beau Clincher in "The Constant Couple." In spite of an overwhelming flood of absurdity and incongruity, this comedy, so long as it can be well performed, will retain its place as a favourite with the public. The character of Sir Harry Wildair, young, licentious, spirited, and witty, makes its way by an irresistible charm; but the display of manly virtue at the close, where a gentleman of

high breeding and indisputable courage chooses to make honourable reparation to a lady for an undesigned affront, rather than extricate himself by means of a duel, throws around him a charm which makes us not only forget, but absolutely love, the levities and the faults which, before, required all the charms of his wit and his graces barely to palliate. His notions of a duel denote a courage which is not tied up within his sword-knot, but which is sustained by a determined reliance on his own sense of justice and propriety. He professes no general resolution against referring a quarrel to the decision of arms; but, at the same time, declares that "he will not send his body to the worms, and his soul to the devil, on every fool's errand." It must be owned that, in the whole transaction which gives occasion to this remark, the conduct both of Sir Harry and the ladies appears much less than proper; but the comedies of Farquhar's time can seldom be judged by the rules which govern society in our days. Virtue and vice never change; but manners, and notions of decorum, are perpetually shifting.

It seems strange that, from the days of Mrs. Woffington to those of Mrs. Jordan, this character has so frequently been played by women; but when we consider the elegant lightness, the amorous flutter, the sprightly repartee, the dialogue full of good sense, but free from every incumbrance of

form or solemnity, which distinguish it in every scene, it appears peculiarly adapted to the powers of an engaging, spirited female. Mrs. Jordan gave it the fullest force; no scene palled in her performance, and not a sentence missed its due effect. Colonel Standard and Lady Lurewell make a somewhat unfavourable impression: the lady's revenge leads her too far into the labyrinths of deceit, and too near the confines of guilt; and the whole history of her love, her ruin, and final discovery of her betrayer, has about it an exaggeration, not to say coarseness, which destroys sympathy, by creating incredulity not unmingled with disgust. Alderman Smuggler is a masterpiece of meanness and dishonesty, whose merited disgrace and punishment are a genuine subject of comic triumph.

Beau Clincher is one of those upstarts whom sudden wealth has converted into fools and coxcombs; who, born to plod in the lower situations of society, suddenly affect to be profligates and beaux; whose muddy brains, intended by nature to ferment only under the influence of "ale or viler liquors," pretend to sparkle as if they had never felt any exhilarating influence but from Champagne or Burgundy: a fellow who is described as having, "on his father's death, broken his indentures; whipped from behind the counter into the side-box; who keeps his coach and liveries, a brace of geld-

ings, leash of mistresses, and talks of nothing but wines, intrigues, plays, fashion, and going to the jubilee." Yet, with all allowances, it occasions a violent effort to suppose that a man who can count five should think of repairing to Rome, to assist at the great festival, prepared only with a pair of pistols to shoot the men with whom he intends to pick quarrels, and a swimming girdle to save his life in case of shipwreck. When played by Bannister, the absurdities in the structure of the part were overlooked: the ponderous levity of the early scenes; the stupid astonishment with which he receives a beating in the disguise of a porter, and his rueful Newgate meditations when he is committed for murdering and robbing the porter, who, in the mean time, is flaunting in his fine coat,—all these were given in Bannister's happiest manner, and exhibited in its utmost perfection the art of comic acting.

Another character, new to Bannister, although well known to the public by means of Parsons, was that of Skirmish in "The Deserter." As it is desirable to avoid comparisons as much as possible, no parallel will be attempted between the two performers. They were essentially different. Parsons, adopting probably the outline of the French original, *Mont-en-ciel,* presented a shrewd, quick-witted fellow, whose original powers were merged, but

not absolutely drowned, in drink. Bannister exhibited a specimen of brutified inebriety, where the mental and corporeal faculties were equally subdued. Each mode of treating the character was just, and the preference of either would mainly depend on the taste of the spectator. Drunkenness can take every form of humour, from that of the stupidly besotted Mr. Sullen, to the irritable Cassio; it is always most agreeable in a brief display, but tiresome and disgusting when pursued through a long succession of scenes.

His original new characters afforded little scope for remark. He played (February 25) Twist, a tailor, in an opera by Cobb, called "Love in the East;" but the humours of tailors had been worn thread-bare from the days of Feeble, and the anonymous knight of the shears in "The Taming of the Shrew," until Morton gave the subject a new and skilful turn in the two Rapids, in his "Cure for the Heart-ache."

A boxing-match, or pugilistic contest, as it is now vulgarly called, at Odiham, between Mendoza, a Jew, and Humphreys, who did not profess that religion, suggested the notion of a farce, which was produced (14th April) for Baddeley's benefit, under the name "'Tis an ill Wind blows nobody good; or, The Road to Odiham." If it blew a good audience into Drury Lane, it was not an ill wind

for the player; but it blew no good to the manager, or any one else. Baddeley, with the aid of Moody, Bannister, Suett, and Mrs. Wilson, could not inflate it with vitality. The daily critics did not lend it a puff; and, in one breath, it expired.

For his own benefit, (21st April,) Bannister had "Transformation," the "Spanish Barber," in which he performed Lazarillo, and "The Invisible Mistress." This farce is an alteration of "Woman's a Riddle," derived from a Spanish piece, which the author was not ashamed to name "Woman's the Devil." In 1718, the proprietorship occasioned a controversy between Bullock and Savage, each claiming what he had no right to. In 1788, not only was there no contest, but I do not find that the authorship was claimed by any one; and the compilers of the Biographia Dramatica, whose extensive research and general accuracy have been too harshly commented on by Mr. Gifford and others, do not so much as notice its existence: no wonder; for, as it was played only one night, they might well accommodate themselves to the general oblivion. I hope it will not be said that I too might, with sound judgment, have followed their example.

Several things occurred in the course of this season, and at its close, to alter the state of Drury Lane theatre. Tom King, for so to the end of his long career he was familiarly and endearingly de-

nominated, resigned the arduous situation of acting manager. If the personal friendship of the performers, and the warm regard of the town, could have compensated those defects which time had occasioned, he might long have retained his position; but the vigour of youth was extinct, and the steady hand which is required to hold the rein in such a company, he no longer possessed. He had never been a tragic actor himself, and his rule in that department was the subject of cavil; he did not pretend to much knowledge in opera; and in comedy, where his forte was acknowledged, he was always open to invidious reflections. If he withheld his efforts, he was taxed with pride and indolence; and when he appeared more frequently, there was a malevolent critic, less celebrated for his judgment, although that was allowed to be great, than stigmatized for his envy, ill-nature, and contempt of truth, ready to assert that the manager kept back rising merit to show his own pretensions, and that he was, like Bottom, desirous of playing every part himself. His situation was further embarrassed by restrictions which almost annihilated the very semblance of authority; and, although deprived of power, he was always held subject to responsibility.

In a luminous and manly statement he explained his position to the public; but although, in defiance of every offer and solicitation, he resigned his post of

manager, he did not definitively withdraw from his profession as an actor. He was, for several reasons, an obstacle to Bannister's advancement. He was in possession of many of the characters to which the younger performer aspired; and, as manager, he rather was supposed to restrain than encourage his endeavours. Bannister, at one time, felt this so severely, that he had thoughts of quitting Drury Lane; but Palmer, by well-timed advice and encouragement, allayed the ferment of his mind, and persuaded him to that course of patience which was consistent with prudence, and led to prosperity.

William Smith, who like King, had been one of the subjects of Churchill's Rosciad, chose, at this period, to retire from theatrical life. He was a man of unusual endowments, having all the advantages of a perfect education at the university of Cambridge, and an early and constant intercourse with the first society. His person was remarkably fine, and his manners highly polished, and of the best school of true gentility. Churchill, when he did not mean to squander applause, terms him

"Smith, the genteel, the airy, and the smart."

He afterward attained to the highest characters in tragedy; and on his retirement, if it was conceded that in Macbeth, Richard, and Biron, his place might be adequately filled, it was also confessed that in Cap-

tain Plume, Lord Townley, Charles, and Clifford, he would leave a chasm which time and oblivion must concur with rising merit in perfectly closing. His last appearance as a regular actor (9th June) was in a character to which he had himself given life and celebrity, Charles in " The School for Scandal."

Long had the public been accustomed to see and to regard with approbation a fair performer, first known by the name of Miss Hopkins; afterward, both as wife and widow, by that of Mrs. Brereton: but, in this season, she was to assume the new appellation of Mrs. Kemble, being married to the great tragedian. There are anecdotes attending this union which deserve to be recapitulated, and which, from the share taken in them by Mr. and Mrs. Bannister, are entitled to a place in this work. It should be premised that Mrs. Brereton was called by the familiar sobriquet of " Pop," so commonly that it was as usual to say Pop Hopkins as if it had been her real Christian name, and she had been a younger sister. As her mother, an admirable comic performer, introduced her to the stage, and attended to all her proceedings with maternal solicitude, it is not improbable that a word of endearment, which she had frequently used in the nursery, was not renounced in the green-room, and, implying nothing offensive, was generally repeated without disrespect, and heard with good-humour.

It is said, and was much believed, but I do not vouch for the truth of the anecdote, that one of the daughters of a noble earl, who had once filled a conspicuous situation in public life, but was now in a state of retirement and heavy corporeal calamity, conceived a strong affection for Mr. Kemble. The earl, it is said, acted on the occasion with characteristic prudence and magnanimity: he sent for the object of his daughter's regard, and stated the facts, observing that it was in Mr. Kemble's power to add a pang to those already oppressing a helpless old man, by pursuing the line which his daughter's predilection indicated; but on the other hand, that he might, without any sacrifice of affection, for he could never have seen the young lady, relieve his mind from a load of apprehension, and restore that tranquillity to which alone he must confine his hopes of happiness. If Mr. Kemble, he added, had formed a predilection for any deserving person, whether in his own profession or not, such a pecuniary contribution as his fortune would enable him to make toward his comfort and respectable establishment, he might command.

Thus far I have proceeded on a common rumour; for what is to follow, I rely on the best information. One evening, Mrs. Brereton addressed Mrs. Hopkins: "My dear mother," she said, "I cannot guess what Mr. Kemble means: he passed me just now,

going up to his dressing-room, and chucking me under the chin said, 'Ha, Pop! I should not wonder if you were soon to hear of something very much to your advantage.' What could he mean?" "Mean," the sensible mother answered, "why he means to propose marriage; and, if he does, I advise you not to refuse him, you will not meet with a better offer."

Thus the matrimonial galley was launched; and the voyage proceeded rapidly, merrily, and to a joyous conclusion, although not unmarked with some peculiar circumstances.

When the lady's consent was obtained and the happy day fixed, Mr. Kemble was living purely *en garçon*, the elegancies of female life never thought on, in a lodging in Caroline Street, Bedford Square. His intimacy with Jack Bannister, and the true regard he felt for him, rendered it natural and easy to request Mrs. Bannister's attendance at the ceremony. This was readily agreed to, and on the appointed morning, the 8th of December, Mrs. Hopkins and Mrs. Brereton, presenting themselves at Bannister's abode in Frith Street, they all repaired to the bridegroom's dwelling. Whether he had been late over-night, or whether, "dreaming of golden joys," he had been unwilling to shorten his morning slumber, certain it is that, when the ladies arrived, there was not the slightest sign of prepara—

tion for breakfast. A number—they could not be termed a set—of tea-things at length appeared, the meal was discussed, the parties reached the church in proper time, and the ceremony was completed by an intimate friend of Kemble, the well-known Parson Este. They were departing in separate coaches, the gentlemen in one, the ladies in the other, when Mrs. Bannister said, "As you do not seem to have made any preparations, suppose you dine with us; but, as both Mrs. Kemble and Mr. Bannister play to-night, the dinner must be early and punctual." This good-natured and considerate offer was readily accepted; the ladies went to Frith Street, and, having waited to the utmost extremity of time, were obliged to dine without the newly-married man. Bannister and Mrs. Kemble had departed before his arrival; dinner was served up again, and at a proper hour Mrs. Bannister left him to his wine, expecting continually that he would appear at the tea-table; at last he did come, but not until it was full time that he should escort his wife home from the theatre. Thither he repaired in a hackney-coach; his wife popped in, and from that moment was installed mistress of a new abode.

Their first appearance on the stage together after this important event, was on the 14th, when the bridegroom was Sir Giles Overreach; the bride, his daughter Margaret. No particular feeling was

excited until near the close of the fourth act, when the father, urging his reluctant daughter to marry Lord Lovell, says

> " Is there aught else to be wish'd after these two
> That are already offer'd,—marriage first,
> And lawful pleasure after:—what would you more?"

The audience (of whom I was one) burst into a tumult of laughter and applause. Kemble, who really possessed, what his biographer, Mr. Boaden, ascribes to him, a true Cervantic humour, was fully aware of the effect which the passage was sure to produce; but did not in the utterance, or by anything which preceded or followed, depart from the dignity and gravity which became Sir Giles, or show the least consciousness of the roguish thought which pervaded the theatre.

From this digression we return to Bannister at the Haymarket, where his first new character (July 10th) was that of Sir David Dunder, in George Colman's whimsical comedy of " Ways and Means; or, A Trip to Dover." This piece deserved and obtained complete success. The author, aiming at perpetual pleasantry, executed his endeavour to the full. His dialogue was always lively and spirited, his situations ingenious and truly laughable; the plot was wrought out by means sufficiently probable, although not of every day's occurrence; and the entanglements of the parties were occasioned and

unravelled without perplexity. Two characters, Roundfee and Quirk, were retrenched after the first season; the first, an advertising procurer of money, was a personation of a man who verified an observation of one of the fathers of the church, that an usurer, like a man who gives cold water to a patient in a burning fever, affords him momentary solace, but in the end destroys him. The name of the person aimed at was Rowntree; and his appellation in the play-bill was not more like that in his advertisement, than Charles Bannister's dress, manner, and general appearance were to his model. Quirk, an attorney, was said to mean somebody; but, on the whole he seemed to be merely one of those disgraceful compounds of ignorance, impudence, and chicane, which were not unknown in the inferior walks of a very honourable and important profession. The part which, more than any other, gave effect to the piece, was that of Sir David Dunder; in which, impatience and self-sufficiency were humorously blended with extreme goodness of heart, generosity and feeling. His presumption is such, that whoever addresses him is cut short with "Be quiet, I know it;" and the ludicrous situations into which he contrives to plunge himself never expose him to contempt, as they never impair his benevolence, or materially ruffle his temper. Bannister's performance of this part was per-

fection; every thing ludicrous was given with the fullest effect, while every honourable trait of character was displayed in its utmost strength and purity. When Bannister had exhibited this whimsical personage, the veteran Parsons hailed his success with a good-humoured observation: "Well, Jack, you had got up three-fourths of the ladder before, but you are now at the very top." To play this character was, for a long time, the favourite aim of those who thought they could shine in private theatricals.

The author did not receive his accustomed meed of undivided applause; he was made to feel much severity of animadversion. To this, in no slight degree, he exposed himself by an epilogue in which he made Palmer personate Johnny Grub, the *doer* of a newspaper. These formidable engines for creating and guiding public opinion were then rapidly rising to the very height of their subsequent power. The affront was bitterly resented; and, as the spirited young author was never wanting in vigour or readiness to repel what he deemed an injury, some smart firing took place. The critics set him up against himself, by insisting that his new piece showed his faculties to be of a retrograde order, as it was much inferior to "Inkle and Yarico;" he turned the censure into a compliment, by showing that it had been written long before the applauded opera.

On the 27th of August, Bannister, for the benefit of Edwin, played Bombardinian, in "Chrononhotonthologos." Every successful dramatic burlesque, not including those introduced into rehearsals, has had its separate species of ludicrous attack or exaggerated simulation: the point successfully aimed at, by Harry Carey, in this piece, was the exposure of a verbose and inflated style, which invests a flimsy thought with pompous but cumbrous words; which delights in combinations of glittering expressions, imparting no thought at all; which, like M. Tojoursdort, in the fairy tale, affects to frighten whole armies by mere unmeaning sounds; or (to illustrate censure by imitation) pretends, with vast agitation and flutter, to incubate the sublime, but hatches only the ridiculous. Thus the impatient king, who cannot go to sleep, exclaims,

> "Sport not with Chrononhotonthologos,
> Thou idle slumberer! thou detested Somnus!
> For, if thou dost, by all the waking powers,
> I 'll tear thine eye-balls from their leaden sockets
> And force thee to outstare eternity."

In a milder mood, his majesty says,

> "Let singing singers,
> With vocal voices, most vociferous,
> In sweet vociferation outvociferize
> E'en sound itself."

Bombardinian is the general of this wordy mon-

arch; and in a hasty quarrel, about eating hashed pork for supper, slays his master in single combat. In the insanity of his horror, he exclaims,

> " Ha! what have I done?
> Go call a coach, and let a coach be called;
> And let the man that calls it be the caller;
> And, in his calling, let him nothing call
> But coach! coach! coach! Oh! for a coach, ye Gods!"

Add to all this the irregular love of the queen for the King of the Antipodes, her husband's captive; the kind descent of Venus to comfort her; her heroic and patriotic resolution to avert the possibility of a civil war by marrying at once two rival courtiers of most opposite character,—Rigdum Funidos, and Aldiborontiphoscophornio; and what is left to be attempted by the authors of such pieces as Bombastes Furioso?

CHAPTER XI.

1788—1789.

Difficulties attending Mr. King's Management.—Parsimony of the Proprietors.—Anecdote.—Mr. Kemble a Manager.—Illness of George the Third.—The Regent, by Mr. Greatheed.—Bannister plays Ben, in Love for Love.—His popularity in sailor-characters.—Anecdote.—Observations on the comedy.—Bannister plays Belcour, in The West-Indian—Juan, in The Doctor and the Apothecary—Brass, in The Confederacy—Muskato, in The Pannel—Lissardo, in The Wonder—Scrub, in The Beaux' Stratagem—Touchstone—Lord Chalkstone, in Lethe—Dashwould, in Know your own Mind—the Abbé, in False Appearances.—The King's recovery—Procession and illumination on the event.—British Loyalty; or, A Squeeze for St. Paul's—written by George Colman—spoken by Bannister.—He plays Trappanti, in She Would and She Would not,—other characters.—Haymarket Season.—Twaddle, in The Family Party.—Mrs. Inchbald's Married Man—Bannister in Sir John Classick.—The Battle of Hexham—observations on it as an imitation of Shakspeare.—Bannister in Goudibert—in Gregory Gubbins.—The elder Colman retires from the management.—Scenes in the Green-room.

In relinquishing the management of Drury Lane, Mr. King complained, in strong terms, of impediments and restrictions perseveringly and teazingly repeated; of a low parsimony by which his exertions

had been trammelled, and his office rendered insupportable. "I was not the manager," he said; "I had not the power, nor, indeed, had I the wish, to approve or reject any dramatic work; the liberty of engaging, encouraging, or discharging any one performer; nor sufficient authority to command the cleaning of a coat, or adding, by way of decoration, a yard of copper lace, both which were often much wanted." Perhaps no difficulty that he experienced gave him more vexation than the perpetual pressure of injudicious economy. Mrs. Linley, the mother of Mrs. Sheridan, had the control of the wardrobe; and it was said that, from excess of economy, she has been known to abridge what she thought the too flowing robe of a tragic performer, to gain for herself the covering of a footstool, or the materials for a velvet pincushion.

That this account is precisely true, I do not venture to assert; but that the following anecdote is so, I am indisputably assured, having heard it from the gentleman to whom it refers. When the afterpiece of "Cœur de Lion" was put in rehearsal, Mr. Sheridan requested his accomplished and witty friend, Mr. Jekyll, who was recently returned from Paris, to bestow a little attention on the getting-up of the piece, especially with respect to dress. The learned gentleman accordingly gave directions how to accoutre Blondel as pilgrim and as knight, Antonio,

Sir Owen, and several other personages; but when he came to the captive king, the economical mistress of the wardrobe could hold out no longer: "Oh! sir," she said, "you need not give yourself any trouble about Richard; we have an excellent dress for Richard, almost as good as new; Mr. Smith played the part in it several times." Could the lady's judgment have prevailed, the admirers of "Cœur de Lion" would have had the surprise of seeing him transformed into Crouch-back.

On the 13th of September, the season began; Kemble had been appointed manager, and declared, in an address to the public, that the power intrusted to him was perfectly satisfactory to his feelings, adequate to the liberal encouragement of poets and performers, and to the conduct of the whole business of the theatre.

In conformity with these confident expressions, the manager prepared for, and carried on, a season of great vigour and exertion, particularly distinguished by the production of new, and the revival and alteration of established dramas. In the course of it, an event occurred which diverted the public attention from matters so light as the drama, and fixed them with great intensity on subjects of the highest political concernment: this was the malady of our excellent, our beloved sovereign, George the Third, and the great and grave discussions which took place on

the appointment of a temporary substitute. To enter into this matter would be extremely remote from the objects of this work; but it had one curious effect on the interests of Drury Lane. In the preceding season, Mr. Bertie Greatheed had produced a tragedy, which, from its own merit, and the powerful support of Kemble and Mrs. Siddons, was well received by the public, and had been performed several times; it was once attempted in this season, but the attempt could not be renewed, for the name of the play was "The Regent."

To Bannister, this season was one of remarkable activity. He now first attempted the representation of an English sailor, a character to which he afterward gave such striking traits of feeling, generosity, and dignity, without abandoning for a moment the faithful exhibition of genuine comedy. The part of Ben, in "Love for Love," (11th October,) in which he first appeared, is not well calculated for the display of his powers. Written before the British sailor had been endeared to us by the delineations of Smollett and so many subsequent writers,—when Tom Bowline, and Jack Rattlin, Commodore Trunnion, Tom Pipes, and Jack Hatchway, and even the humorous caricature, Captain Crow, in Sir Lancelot Greaves, were not among our acquaintance,—Ben was sketched by the poet as a being all rough, coarse, and unmannered; nor was he

void of the selfishness, hard-heartedness, and brutality of his father, Sir Sampson Legend. The character had generally been presented as one of extreme low life, recommended chiefly by the talents of Shuter, Edwin, and performers in that walk of comedy. In the hands of Bannister it assumed a form somewhat new, and greatly improved. His appearance conciliated the good opinion of the audience. His handsome person, and easy gait and demeanour, are well portrayed by De Wilde in a likeness engraved and published in Bell's British Theatre, and separately in a quarto size; and the picture affords a clear representation of the ease, lightness, and grace with which Bannister adorned the character. In the dialogue, the grossness used in speaking to and of Miss Prue was veiled, as far as it could be, by the light and joyous manner of the performer: when he was duped by Mrs. Frail, he did not show himself a helpless sea-calf, or, as she calls him, a porpoise stranded on a lee shore; but vented his homely reproaches against her inconstancy with a justness of feeling, and manliness of deportment, which rescued him from everything approaching to contempt: and when, upon his venting indignation against his father, Mrs. Frail termed him a graceless and undutiful wretch, he threw into a speech which, uttered by another, would have consigned the part to hatred and contempt, a genuine comic expression,

which made it only an effusion of hasty passion and misjudging heat. "Then why was father graceless first?—If I am undutiful and graceless, why did he beget me so?—I did not get myself." Beside these faults of character, Ben evinces a total indifference toward the sufferings of his brother, and a rapacious desire to profit by his ruin; yet Bannister achieved the difficult task of rendering him a favourite, and the public always received him with pleasure, and crowned him with applause.

In after-times, when the muse of Dibdin had given grace, and the events of war were daily showering glory on the sailor of Old England, parts were given to Bannister which, if inferior in wit to that by Congreve, allowed the player an opportunity of courting applause without imposing on him the task of averting disgust: such were Robin, in "No Song, no Supper;" Will Steady, in "The Purse;" and some others, which Bannister filled with unvarying merit and unabated success.

His first appearance in Ben was marked by an interesting circumstance. His royal highness the Duke of Clarence, intimately acquainted with the navy, and qualified to observe any deviation from correctness in appearance or manner, was behind the scenes when Bannister came in dressed for the part. "What!" said the illustrious sailor, "would you wear that coloured handkerchief round your neck?

—it must be changed." A black one was procured; and the good-natured, open-hearted prince assisted with his own hand to give it the tie, the position, all that could contribute to make the performer show like a genuine son of the ocean.

Of the comedy of "Love for Love," be it observed, that the cast comprised an unusual assemblage of dramatic talent: Kemble, Parsons, Moody, Dodd, and Bannister filled the principal male parts; while Miss Pope, Mrs. Jordan, and, never-to-be-forgotten, Miss Farren, graced the female list. Yet, with all the wit which sparkles in every line of the play, with all the grace it could derive from the ability of such performers, many persons felt uncomfortable and dissatisfied when the performance was ended.—Why?—Because there is not a spark of virtue or honour in any person in the whole drama. This observation is not aimed at the characters in whom such qualifications could not be expected, as Tattle, Scandal, or Jeremy; nor at such ladies as Mrs. Frail and Mrs. Foresight; but we turn with disgust from the father who, with unrelenting perseverance, endeavours to hunt his son into the toils of ruin, working on his necessities at one time, and practising on his supposed insanity at another. Nor does the marriage, hastened on at last to fulfil the title of the play, reconcile the mind to the duplicity and stratagems of Valentine, or the unfemi-

nine artifice by which Angelica dupes Sir Sampson, and gains the power of rescuing her lover from a distress into which he has been plunged by his own imprudence.

It should have been stated, in the account of the preceding year, that Bannister acted Tattle in the comedy: he did not retain the character which Dodd so ably portrayed, nor did his playing it affect, in any degree, his general reputation, or his position at the theatre.

His next new part (25th October) was Belcour, in Cumberland's "West-Indian." This excellent comedy may, upon the whole, be deemed the *chef d'œuvre* of its prolific author. Belcour is a fine exhibition of an understanding clear and strong, although unguided and uninformed; of sentiments unalloyed by baseness, although not exempt from the consequences of levity; and of a heart which the possession of wealth and a total absence of control have left, in the midst of gaiety and self-will, free from any taint of sordid impulse or of unworthy aspiration. The brisk, blundering activity, the easy confidence, the rapid advance toward doubtful and dangerous adventures, suited well with Bannister's talents: but the part did not remain in his hands; other performers made it more successfully their own, and he readily surrendered it. On the whole, this is a play with which every true friend of the

drama must be gratified. Pride, hard-heartedness, and grossness in the person of Lady Rusport, dishonesty and unfaithfulness in that of Varland, and unprincipled villany in Fulmer and his odious wife, are all justly visited with disgrace and punishment; while female honour and delicacy, manly courage and high integrity, meet their just retribution in the felicity of the young characters; and while the benevolent feelings of an audience are gratified to the extreme in the consolidated happiness of Mr. Stockwell, the rescue from poverty and hardship of Captain Dudley, and in the undefined portion of felicity which crowns the benevolence, courage, and zeal of the brave, blundering, warm-hearted Major O'Flaherty.

On the same night that he undertook Belcour, Bannister appeared as Juan, in a new farce by Cobb, "The Doctor and the Apothecary." This piece, supported by his talents and those of Kelly, Sedgwick, Parsons, Dodd, Mrs. Crouch, and Miss Romanzini, better known as Mrs. Bland, met with great and merited success, derived less from any ingenuity in the plot, spirit in the dialogue, or poetical merit in the songs, than from the novel and judicious manner in which the music was selected and adapted by Ditters and Storace. It was taken chiefly, but not altogether, from an Italian opera; but the great art consisted in making every air and duet produce its

utmost effect by not overloading any performer with difficulties, or condemning him to struggle with compositions which could only acquire applause by exciting wonder without producing pleasure. The style of this little opera became a model, which was followed during several years,—so long as Storace continued to compose for the English stage. Bannister's character was marked by much whimsical vivacity, and showed him in several disguises; he was now, too, a regular vocal performer, and if not by his fine voice, at least by his correct judgment, he gained as much applause in "Sighing never gains a maid," as any other performer, male or female, could derive from more finished strains and more polished execution.

Brass, in "The Confederacy," a character which always conferred celebrity on him who performed it well, was attempted (24th November) by Bannister; Palmer playing Dick; Mrs. Jordan, Corinna; and Miss Farren, Clarissa. In Brass, Bannister rose to a high pitch of excellence; he showed with great skill the hard-headed, shameless, resolute adventurer, insolent when he dared, and obsequiously humble when insolence would no longer suit his purpose. Of the structure of this comedy it is not necessary to say much; the vice and folly of amorous old men and their extravagant young wives, with the tricks of impudent beggarly adventurers,

present a picture in which virtue can be thought to receive encouragement only from the exposure of profligacy and folly. But the animated bustle of the plot, and the admirable ease of Vanbrugh's dialogue, make it always the amusing, if not the instructive or very laudable, occupation of a theatrical evening.

By the care of Mr. Kemble, a very agreeable farce, under the title of " The Pannel," was formed from Bickerstaff's " 'Tis well it 's no worse." Scenes of extraordinary liveliness and bustle, replete with whim, embarrassment, and adventure, afforded scope to the powers of Bannister and Mrs. Jordan, who, in Muskato and Beatrice, rendered the piece highly popular, and never appeared in it but to receive renewed and increased applause. Fun is its only object; and the true test and best reward of successful pleasantry, repeated and unrestrained laughter, was the author's constant reward.

Lissardo, in " The Wonder," which he performed on the 1st of January 1789, when Kemble appeared in Don Felix, became one of his constant characters; but he did not often repeat Scrub, in " The Beaux' Stratagem," which he first played on the 7th of the same month. These two comedies have been long established in the public opinion; " The Wonder," as a masterpiece of comic intrigue, conducted with great pleasantry and profound judgment; " The

Stratagem," as one of the most distinguished efforts of the justly celebrated Farquhar. All the characters, and no play exhibits a greater variety, are powerfully and ingeniously portrayed; they are placed in situations perfectly natural: the incidents, although striking and animating, are never forced or violent; and the pleasure derived from this combination of excellences is never intermitted or diminished. The only drawback on the applause due to this admirable comedy, is the condition in which Mrs. Sullen is left on the winding up of the drama. The question, "what is the poor lady to do?" is not easily answered. Perhaps some future improver of the comedy will make Sir Freeman take his sister under his care; or some bolder projector will strike Mr. Sullen with a fit of apoplexy, and give a hint that, after a sufficient quarantine, Archer and Mrs. Sullen may come together on honourable terms. The moral may thus be amended, but not the comedy. Such an improvement has been effected in "The Chances," where, Don John, a Spanish nobleman, meets the runaway mistress of an old debauchee in the streets of Naples, and, to satisfy what is considered a refinement of dramatic taste, concludes the modern play by marrying her. An offensive disregard of the rules of delicacy and propriety cannot be justified in any drama; but it is possible, by unnecessary strictness, to drive na-

ture and probability entirely from the stage. Palmer and Miss Farren played Archer and Mrs. Sullen, and Don John and the second Constantia, and it was not suspected at the time that the taste and morals of any audience were depraved by the exhibition.

On the 20th of February, Bannister played Touchstone, of all Shakspeare's clowns perhaps the greatest favourite. Argumentative, satirical, witty, honest, artless, and affectionate, his shrewd observations on life, manners, and individuals, always excite a welcome smile; while his devotion to his ladies, his voluntary encounter, for their sake, of banishment, poverty, and all the uncertainties of a roving life, and even his affection for the silly Audrey, raise sentiments of warm regard, and he stands more elevated in our esteem than many personages of higher pretensions. King had long gained eminent applause in this part; he had imparted to it a tone and manner which no one could excel, and which rendered the attempt to follow him, while he was still remembered, hazardous and difficult. Bannister's representation was different from his; but it was such as to fix him immovably in Touchstone when King was absent, as in this season, and when he had finally retired. It was, in all respects, worthy of the author's conception. Those who had never seen King, had a full idea of the part com-

municated by Bannister, and no successor of his could improve the force and beauty of his delineation.

An attempt was made to revive Garrick's "Lethe," a farce in which he had performed four characters. Bannister undertook only one, that of Lord Chalkstone; but the piece was not much repeated.

Murphy's comedy, "Know your own mind," was acted (21st April) for the benefit of Mrs. Jordan: she was Lady Bell; and Bannister, Dashwould. The misfortune of the author in this play is well known. During the popularity of its first run at Covent Garden, "The School for Scandal" appeared at the other house: there was an affinity in some of the characters, and a similarity in some parts of the plot, which rendered comparisons inevitable; and Murphy retreated before the superior force of Sheridan: he was even obliged to acknowledge it as a mitigation of his misfortune, that his play had appeared first; for, if it had not, the charge of plagiarism might have been fixed upon him. Yet "Know your own mind" is an admirable production; the characters vividly depicted, the plot active and well imagined and the denouement in all respects satisfactory. Dashwould is a young man of warm heart and manly feeling, but who gives himself up too readily to the repetition of current scandal, and shows much wit in that kind of description of indi-

viduals, which the French at the time called portraits. In some of these his satire had an appearance of malice; but when the occasion arrived for promoting the cause of virtue, and dragging villany into full light, his activity, judgment, and vigour were sufficient to rescue him from every reproach, and place him very high in our esteem. In all its varieties, Bannister gave the utmost force to the representation; but, as Dashwould is neither lover, deceiver, nor dupe, his character, however well performed, is deemed one of inferior interest. The play was often repeated in subsequent seasons, and he was never superseded.

"*Les Dehors Trompeurs*," a comedy, by M. Boissey, which had constituted one of the entertainments of the elegant private theatre at Richmond House, was presented to Drury Lane under the title of "False Appearances." It was the work of the Honourable Seymour Conway; at least, so it was said, and generally believed at the time: but the biographer of Mrs. Inchbald raises a doubt, that the translation may have been made by her, and transferred to a nobleman who was anxious to offer compliments where he was cherished and esteemed, and where he knew they would be well received. Bannister sustained the part of an Abbé, an useless intrusion on the original plot, and unworthy of his

skill and talent. The piece, with all the influence of fashion, was endured only six nights, and probably will never be revived.

Before the time for Bannister's benefit, the anxieties of the nation had been relieved by the recovery of the King from his alarming indisposition; and his Majesty, with characteristic piety, on Saint George's day (23rd April), had repaired to Saint Paul's to render thanks to the King of kings for his deliverance. A noble procession attended him, and a brilliant and general illumination took place at night. Words cannot convey an adequate idea of the cordial satisfaction felt by the crowd, which choked up the streets through which the procession passed; while every window, door-way, and opening of every kind, was occupied by eager and delighted gazers. No occasion can be cited which offers a parallel to the rejoicing of the day, and the evening's illumination; in which, not only public buildings, the dwellings of tradesmen, or the abodes of the wealthy, exhibited the signs of joyful congratulation, but every habitation, however humble, even the lodging of the poorest artisan, offered its spontaneous demonstration. It was the most glorious display of animated loyalty ever witnessed.

To commemorate this event, and to serve his friend, George Colman wrote an address called "British Loyalty; or, a Squeeze for Saint Paul's,"

hich Bannister recited for his benefit (30th April), n his happiest and most effective manner, and hich was frequently repeated. After describing he squeeze then before him, and bantering some oble personages on their aversion to mobs, he pro-eeded—

" But now, thank Heaven! one glorious great occasion,
One happy cause of loyal emulation,
Has levelled taste, and crowded all the nation.
'Twas Nature drew the scene,—strong, chaste, and glowing;
London, her theatre, was overflowing:
The streets, or pit, of joyous shining faces;
The Belle and Beau took low front-window places.
Such squeezing, jostling!—here some stand, some sit;
All anxious,—for 'twas England's benefit!
Oh! may that day on record stand, and age
In future times delighted turn the page!
The April morn chasing the dreary hours
Of gloomy winter, smil'd, yet smil'd in showers:
Thus did the heart in every eye appear;
While rapture beam'd, affection dropt a tear.

hen, after describing with humorous effect the ex-amations and behaviour of an Irishman, a Welsh-an, and a Jew, he comes to a loyal Scotchman, ho says,

" 'For since sae happy tidings have gone forth,
Gud faith! 't has warm'd aw bosoms thro' the north.'
'Warm'd you!' (exclaims a fine old soul,) 'warm'd you?
Why it has warm'd me, friend,—I'm ninety-two;
Pray now make room, I'm old and weak, but I
Would needs crawl out to see my King come by;
And then I'll totter home content, and die.'

'Cheerly, old boy!' cries Heart-of-oak, 'that's right;
Keep it up, merry heart!—we'll all drink and fight;
Push, jostle, squeeze our souls out,—any thing
In honour of our good and gracious King.
Roar away, messmates! strike up now or never,
Long live the King!—may the King live for ever!'"

Before I quit this subject, I must relate an anecdote which Bannister used frequently to repeat, having derived it from Sir William Beechey himself. "Sir William," said the King, "did you see the sight?" "I did, Sire," the Knight answered. "And from where?" the King inquired. "From a house at the corner of Saint Paul's church-yard." "I wish I had been there too," the sovereign replied, "for I saw nothing but the broad scarlet and gold shoulders of my coachman."

On the same occasion, Bannister made his first appearance as Trappanti, in Cibber's ingenious, merry, bustling comedy, "She would and she would not." This piece is a true and admirable specimen of that kind of writing which, without illustrating any particular virtue, exposing any striking vice, or exciting any powerful emotion, keeps the attention alive, and the spirits exhilarated, by a succession of natural comic adventures, until it terminates in a satisfactory close. Trappanti afforded room for an advantageous display, of which Bannister fully availed himself. His ready impudence, convenient mendacity, easy derivation of advantage from all possible

circumstances, animated by a never-failing good-humour, and crowned by an unshaken fidelity, made him the genuine representative of the familiar valet, a personage quite natural in foreign comedy, but entirely alien to English habits and manners.

His remaining pieces on this night, were the madlog scene from "The Genius of Nonsense," and "The Virgin Unmasked."

For the benefit of Baddeley (9th May), he performed Jack, in "A Lesson for Lawyers," derived from Foote's "Lame Lover," a farce at no time very fortunate; and, for that of Dignum (28th May), he made his first appearance in Trudge.

At the Haymarket the season commenced, on the 18th of May, with a farcical illustration of one of Hogarth's admirable graphic satires, by the elder Colman: it was called "Ut Pictura, Poesis; or, The Enraged Musician." Bannister did not appear in it, nor did he perform anything remarkable until the 11th of July, when he played Sir Toby Twaddle in "The Family Party;" a farce of no great merit, nor of any considerable success: its instant condemnation was probably averted by the ability which Bannister displayed in Twaddle, the only tolerable character in the piece.

Mrs. Inchbald's farce of "The Married Man" (15th July) was the next novelty of the season. It was written with more spirit and good taste than

originality. Destouches was the author of it in French; he called it "Le Philosophe Marié;" and a translation, with the literal title, "The Married Philosopher," by John Kelly, had been performed fifty years before at Lincoln's Inn Fields. Holcroft dissuaded the lady from the exhibition; but Colman was highly pleased, gave the piece a name, and, in a fortnight after it had been read in the Green-room, submitted it to the public. Although the other parts were strongly cast, Bannister, as Sir John Classick, was the principal cause of success. He displayed, with great force and ingenuity, the feelings, the anxieties, the small discontents, and inexpressible cares, which haunt a philosopher who, after revelling in all the luxury of literary liberty, has persuaded himself to surrender his uncontrolled freedom, his settled habits, his darling pursuits, to the laws and arrangements of married life. Poor Holcroft seems to have shared the fate of Gil Blas when he gave candid counsel to the Archbishop of Granada; for Mr. Boaden informs us that, although he had been of great assistance to the fair authoress while composing her novel, "The Simple Story," yet, in the month ensuing his advice, "very unpleasant notices appear in her diary, relating to her literary friend;" and, from about the 10th of August their intercourse was at least suspended, if not terminated.

But the great dramatic effort of the season was George Colman's "Battle of Hexham," an opera in three acts, in which the author put forth his utmost skill in the construction of the plot, the delineation of the characters, and the composition of the dialogue and songs. The personages are partly heroic, partly comic; and the principal events are the loss of that battle so fatal to the cause of the House of Lancaster, the flight of the Queen and the Prince her son, and the support and assistance they obtain, through Margaret's commanding intrepidity, from a robber. It is judiciously managed, that the play shall end when the royal fugitives, having escaped from the perils of the field and the pursuit of their foes, enjoy the happy prospect of reaching the French coast, and deriving succours from the Duke of Burgundy; sparing the audience the pang of witnessing the captivity of the unhappy Queen, and the savage murder of the stripling Prince.

In such a composition, the author would naturally provoke comparisons between himself and Shakspeare; and therefore he wisely elected to adopt a professed, although limited imitation of his style. "Plays," he says in his preface, "which exhibit incidents of former ages, should have the language of the characters conform to their dress. To copy Shakspeare in the general tournure of his phraseology is a mechanical task, which may be accomplished

with a common share of industry and observation; and this I have attempted (for the reason assigned), endeavouring, at the same time, to avoid a servile quaintness which would disgust. To aspire to a resemblance of his boundless powers, would have been the labour of a coxcomb; and, had I been vain enough to have essayed it, I should have placed myself in a situation similar to that of the strolling actor who advertised his performance of a part "in imitation of the inimitable Garrick." (This strolling player, by the bye, was Waldron; the place, Richmond; and the part, King Lear.)

In pursuance of this plan of professed imitation, Colman has exhibited a wandering lady in man's attire, quitting her home, and, in the purity of conjugal loyalty, seeking her absent lord; a fool who, like Touchstone, attends, in the true spirit of honourable service, the footsteps of his lady, and whose mixture of hearty affection, love of ease, and want of courage, produces some comic effects: there is also another fool, who bears less upon the plot, but who occasions some mirth. Many others of the inferior characters are written in the Shakspearian vein; and there is a band of robbers well characterised by their daring valour, their unrelenting rapacity, and their boisterous revelry.

The captain of this rugged troop, who mixes not in their mirth, but restrains their ferocity, is Gondi-

bert, the husband of the disguised lady, a true adherent of the house of Lancaster, whom the concussions of the time have obliged to quit his castle and seek the refuge of the forest. This part was performed by Bannister, with great and deserved applause. In language and conduct it had greater affinity to his early tragic attempts than his more recent comic pursuits; but its manly integrity, firm, unshaken spirit, and genuine affection, were well suited to his character and talents, and never failed to interest and gratify the spectators. A speech which he addresses to his lady, who, not known to him, pretends to desire the life of a robber, afforded a fine occasion for the display of his powers, and is a favourable specimen of those of the author.

" Hast thou well weigh'd the hardships which our life
Constrains us to?—our perils, nightly watchings,
Our fears, disquietudes, our jealousies,
Even of ourselves? which keep the lawless mind
For ever on the stretch, and turn our sleep
To frightful slumbers; where imagination
Discovers to the dull and feverous sense
Mis-shapen forms, ghastly and horrible;—
And mixes in the chaos of the brain
Terrors, half real, half unnatural;
Till Nature, struggling under the oppression,
Rouses the sleeping wretch—who starts, and wipes
The chilly drop from off his clay-cold temples;
And fain would call for help, yet dares not utter,
But trembles on his couch, silent and horror-struck!"

On one occasion, for his own benefit, after the death of Edwin, to whom it had been originally assigned, he played the part of Gregory Gubbins, the faithful fool who follows the lady; and perhaps this character, if he had originally filled it, would have been deemed more congenial to his ability than any other. But the necessity of choosing between them never arose: the battle of Hexham soon faded from notice; less, I believe, because the subject ceased to interest, than because the author wrote other pieces which more powerfully arrested the public attention. Cavilling critics were not wanting to decry this speech, to quarrel with that part of the plot, or to censure, each according to his fancy, some particular which he did not approve. To one of these Colman gave an answer, which, although from frequent repetition it may have grown common, has yet too much felicity to be omitted. A learned physician, in presence of the author, uttered a vehement and detailed criticism on the play, with suggestions for improving it in plot, conduct, and dialogue: when he had done, Colman said, "My good doctor, you seem to be under a mistake; it is 'The Battle of Hexham,' not the bottle of Huxham, we are discussing."

After this season, the elder Colman ceased to be manager of the Haymarket theatre, and the property became vested in his son. Colman is well-

own as having formed, with Churchill, Lloyd. ornton, and some others, that constellation which, ring the early years of the reign of George the ird, allured the wits and overawed the dunces, was deservedly celebrated as a dramatist, an ayist, and a poet. Of the maladies and calami- s which attended his latter years, it is neither essary nor desirable here to speak. One anec- e, well-known at the time, but now perhaps little nembered, shall be preserved. About the year 85, he made a translation of Horace's "Art of etry," and sent a copy to an old friend, a worthy onet, whose classical learning did not equal the dness of his heart or the soundness of his under- nding. "George," said the baronet, "you have l down some very good rules for the writing of ys; but who the devil are these Pisos that you k of so much?"

At this time, and for some years afterward, the en-room of the Haymarket theatre formed a ıtre in which was united a larger portion of wit, asantry, and unbounded hilarity than any other ce could present. All was mirth and frolic; care l spleen were alike refused admission; and, if t was occasionally shown in a little sharpness of nark, it was parried, retorted, or submitted to, thout the least sign of irritation, or any harbour- ; of resentment. If, by chance, (and who can

altogether exclude such chances from the chequered game of life?)—if, by chance, a momentary misunderstanding arose, the appearance of either Bannister, Charles or Jack, was that of the mythological divinity coming at the right moment to untie the puzzling knot, and restore everything to its proper state. Without the formality of a direct submission to their sentence, the decision pronounced, or the course suggested, by either, met with general acquiescence; and, without possessing or affecting any authority or pre-eminence, each was hailed as a peace-maker, and bowed to as a judge.

Behind the scenes, this merry group frequently played off as much lively farce as was ever exhibited before the curtain. The comic corps at this house was of extraordinary strength. Hardly a comedian of great powers or high estimation appeared at the winter theatres, whose name was not enrolled at Colman's. These merry sprites seemed to have no object in view beyond that of raising a heart-easing laugh, without inflicting a moment's pain. Incessant wit, repartee, and pun were played off at almost every step of the steep, narrow stairs that led from the back part of the scenes to the respective dressing-closets of the performers. It was a perpetually-moving, bustling display of gaiety and mirth, unrivalled in any other spot.

Rules for the preservation of order were composed,

written, framed and glazed, and hung up in the green-room; and in that room, where all the performers, male and female, eminent and humble, were assembled, those rules were respected: but, when once the portal was passed, the reign of fun and frolic recommenced; and all the lively spirits, which on the stage set the audience in a roar, now practised their pleasantry to amuse each other.

When it is considered that the recollection of these revels brought back to his mind such men as Palmer, Parsons, Edwin, Dick Wilson, Suett, and a host of others, not to name the ladies, who in his times formed the comic glory of the Haymarket, it cannot excite wonder that Bannister dwelt on the circumstances with delight. "I have often thought," he said, "that I was very fortunate in making one of this pleasant, professional, amicable coterie. I think there was as little mixture of envy, jealousy, or malevolence prevailing among us, as ever could exist amid so many competitors for the same prize,—the applause of the public."

CHAPTER XII.

1789 — 1790 — 1791.

Mr. Kemble revives Vanburgh's False Friend. — Bannister in Lopez. — Capture of the Bastile in Paris. — The Island of St. Marguerite, by Mr. St. John. — Bannister in Jonas. — The Haunted Tower, — the Music by Storace. — Bannister and Signora Storace in Edward and Adela. — The Two Gentlemen of Verona revived. — Bannister plays Speed, — Sir Anthony Absolute, in The Rivals; — Tony Lumpkin, — Gradus, in Who 's the Dupe; — Bramble, in The Adventurers; — Robin, in No Song, no Supper. — General view of the Season. — Haymarket. — Bannister plays Young Philpot, in The Citizen, — Observations on his performance, — Character of it by Mr. Leigh Hunt. — Bannister plays Tobine, in The Suicide; — La Fourbe, in Try again; — Wattle, in The Basket-maker, by O'Keeffe. — Death of Edwin, — his character as a player. — Drury Lane. — Death of the Duke of Cumberland. — King returns to Drury Lane. — Better Late than Never, a comedy. — The Siege of Belgrade. — Bannister in Leopold. — The Cave of Trophonius. — Hue and Cry. — The Greek Slave; or, A School for Cowards, altered from the Humorous Lieutenant. — Bannister plays the Lieutenant, — Jerry Sneak, in The Mayor of Garratt. — End of the Season, — and of the Theatre. — Observations on its structure and size.

By way of experiment, it may be supposed, of his own powers to represent a bold, fiery, unprincipled libertine, Mr. Kemble put on the Drury

Lane stage (24th October) his own alteration of Vanburgh's "False Friend." He performed the hero, Don John, a personage as wicked, but not nearly so lively and entertaining, as his name-sake; who, in travelling all over Europe, has, from the days of Tom Shadwell to the present, made himself so well known to the English nation, in comedy, (or rather tragedy,) pantomime, and opera, both serious and burlesque, under the names of John, Juan, and Giovanni. Vanburgh's Don John is a heavy-witted villain, and yet he had too much vivacity for Kemble to reach; and the play was not improved by his being reformed at the end, instead of being stabbed. Bannister was Lopez, his valet; whose principal business is to be beaten, to moralize, and to go to sleep. All that could be done for the piece he achieved, but the revival had no success; it was acted only twice.

In July 1789, the populace, or people of Paris, aided by the imbecility of some, and the treachery of others, had captured and destroyed the Bastile, liberated the seven prisoners it contained, and opened amid carnage and innumerable horrors and atrocities, the career of revolution. Inapprehensive of the consequences, the people of England heard with pleasure of the destruction of a prison, the very name of which had been used to fill them with detestation and horror. The minor theatres,

Astley's in particular, had formed dramatic shows representing the event. The Honourable Mr. St. John prepared an after-piece for Drury Lane, called "The Island of St. Marguerite," in which, to avoid the too direct introduction of recent events, he supposed the person most known at the time, through the writings of Voltaire, as "The Man in the Iron Mask," to be incarcerated in that fortress, discovered by his friends, and liberated in consequence of a popular insurrection. It is difficult to imagine how such a set of incongruities and absurdities could have been congested in the brain of any reasoning man. But, thanks to the prevalent feeling, it was successful, and for a time a favourite: its very incongruities created applause; and the rising of the Temple of Liberty from the ruins of the dismantled fortress was hailed as a master-stroke of human wit, while, in fact, the whole credit was due to the machinist alone. The harangue of the French *avocat*, too, who moves to issue a writ of habeas corpus to bring in the body of the imprisoned unknown, was cheered as a fine specimen of the genius and talent of the author. The incident related by Voltaire of the prisoner having engraved something on a silver plate, and thrown it out of a window, seems to have suggested the idea of introducing a fisherman into the drama; he was named Jonas; and Bannister contrived, without the aid of wit or good writing

from the author, to make the part interesting and agreeable. He is in love with Nannette, an attendant in a neighbouring nunnery, played by Miss Romanzini; and their acting and singing were, exclusive of the pantomime portion, the great support of the piece. Kelly, as the Man in the Mask, sang well what he had to sing, and was decently dismal; Nannette had a charming song, which began "There stood Jonas at the window;" and Bannister in one, to the tune, fashionable at the time, of "O bravo, caro Calpigi," gave great pleasure, and smuggled off the stale joke of an oyster being crossed in love.

Cobb's opera of "The Haunted Tower," acted speedily after "The Iron Mask," (24th November,) opened a more extensive field to the talent of Bannister; gave to the town a better style of music than had of late been attempted; and presented to them, in Signora Storace, a new performer, whose qualifications, both as singer and comedian, elevated her to the highest favour. Although she came from the Opera-house, where, for some seasons, she had been first comic singer, and her name was sounded according to the Italian pronunciation, she was an Englishwoman; and the audience was not doomed, as had been the case with Miss Prudom and Signora Sestini, to hear the King's English mercilessly hacked, and to draw an obscure meaning from under an oppressive mass of mispronunciation. The music

was composed and selected by Storace, the brother of the performer, who has already been mentioned as assisting in "The Doctor and the Apothecary." His present specimen of ability placed his efforts in constant requisition, until he was removed by an early death. All the singers had pieces, not only agreeable in themselves, but perfectly adapted to their separate talents. The manly tones of Sedgwick in "My native land I bade adieu," the sweet recitation of Dignum in "The Hunting Chorus," the scientific skill of Kelly in the bravura, "Spirit of my sainted sire," the playful sweetness of Mrs. Crouch in "Though pity I cannot deny," of Romanzini in "Nature to woman still so kind," and particularly the exquisite feeling of Storace in her first song, "Whither, my Love,"—all produced the highest delight, and furnished matter for the performance of the accomplished, and the essays of the unfinished musician in private society. Even the ballads which were introduced, such as "Though time has from your lordship's face," and "The banished ills of heretofore," from two French songs, "*On doit soixante mille francs*," and "*Vivent les fillettes*," gave great pleasure; but musical satisfaction was carried to its highest pitch by the sestette which concludes the first act, and the scolding duet between Mrs. Crouch and Signora Storace in the last.

From this period, a new style of music prevailed

n the English stage. The specimens of adapted allad, carried to the highest perfection in "The Beggar's Opera," can no longer be essayed; the improvements effected in "Love in a Village," "The Duenna," and even in "Rosina," are no longer sufficient to satisfy the scientific ear; and the choicest productions of the Italian and Germans schools are now introduced into our English pieces. But improvement has its limits, and it may reasonably be doubted whether we are not aiming at something beyond the scope of our drama, or even the limits of our language. An English opera is, properly, a comedy enlivened by music. A plot, diversified characters, and interesting occurrences are expected; and these, to be relished, must be understood. Such are the principles on which the operas which have longest retained their reputation (as those of Bickerstaff, Sheridan, and O'Keeffe,) are formed: but where the business and passion of whole scenes, or sometimes of whole acts, are consigned to recitative and song, it is much to be feared that fashion, rather than feeling, causes the piece to be endured; and that, a few *cognoscenti* excepted, the audience in general keep their places chiefly that they may not be singular in society, by acknowledging their ignorance of performances and performers which so many exult in having seen.

In "The Haunted Tower," the plot is too slight to be worth unravelling; but the incidents flow

rapidly and merrily, and lead to a desired conclusion, if by ways not entirely natural or free from buffoonery, yet by such as occasion no disgust. In this piece Bannister and Storace supported each other, and commenced a career which was long maintained to the great delight of the public. Edward is placed, without fault of his own, in a situation of considerable embarrassment: his troubles are highly ludicrous; but his honesty, bluntness, sincerity in love, and good-humour in the midst of his difficulties, portrayed with the utmost skill and a constant adherence to nature, place him very high in the rank of the drama. A song to a French tune *(Qui veut ouir, qui veut savoir)*, beginning "Now all in preparation for the nuptial celebration," was given with the utmost strength of comedy. I believe this to be the first instance where the singer interrupted the progress of his tune, to introduce spoken passages of narrative or illustration: it formed the precedent for what are now, in the technical slang, called "patter songs." In Adela, Storace was Bannister in petticoats. The same *naïveté* the same bluntness of manner, the same appearance of integrity and warmth of affection, distinguished both. They shared, and they well deserved, the meed of fervid applause continued during two successive seasons, in which the opera was performed eighty times, and which always continued to be a favourite.

Kemble revived or altered, in the course of the season, several plays, the merit of which was often doubtful, and their reception discouraging. In "The Two Gentlemen of Verona," Bannister took the character of Speed. This comedy had never been much a favourite; the most striking incident, that of a man of rank becoming a captain of banditti, was deemed the less interesting from its having been so recently displayed in "The Battle of Hexham:" and, after three performances, the comedy was restored to a repose which it had already enjoyed, according to the play-bills, for twenty years.

In several other revivals, Bannister played characters; but neither their importance, nor their success, entitle them to notice. Those in which he made the greatest impression, and which he afterward retained, were, Sir Anthony Absolute in "The Rivals," a part well adapted to his powers, and which he selected (14th April) for his benefit; and the equally well-known Tony Lumpkin, in "She stoops to conquer." The first-mentioned comedy is well-known as the *coup d'essai* of Sheridan. It differs materially from his subsequent productions. It has fewer sparkles of wit than are exhibited in the plays which he wrote in later years; but in character and contrivance, not to call it plot, "The Rivals" is prominent in excellence. Almost every

individual who appears on the scene, from the highest to the most humble, has some powerful mark of distinction: many are original; and those for which models may be discovered in the works of previous writers, are still recommended by some features of novelty. For example: it may be said that Lydia Languish is not altogether a new dramatic acquaintance to those who have known Colman's Polly Honeycomb, or the two romance-reading ladies *in* "*Les precieuses ridicules*" of Molière; and that fighting Bob, with his oaths referential, and his courage oozing out at his fingers' ends, may have been suggested to the author by some of his dramatic readings. But, if this is admitted, it will not be so easy to discover the prototype of the stern, uncompromising assertor of parental authority displayed in Sir Anthony Absolute. Parents of choleric temper and harsh manners are common enough; but the peculiarly determined and overbearing character of Sir Anthony, when he is neither inflamed by passion, nor irritated by resistance, is of an unusual, if not a totally novel construction. But should it be thought that the circumstances of resemblance take from this part the claim of absolute originality, where are we to find a parallel for Falkland? His irritable sensibility; his virtuous jealousy, free from the meanness and selfishness which generally characterize that passion, exempt from the

inquisitive vigilance by which it is so constantly disgraced, proceeding, not from an ungenerous suspicion of his mistress's truth, or an envious view of the captivating qualities of some other man, but entirely from a painful apprehension of his own want of merit, and a fear that he cannot excite a warmth and truth of affection corresponding to his own; this is a character which any dramatist might be proud to have produced, and it is one which, I should say, belongs exclusively and entirely to Sheridan. The personages in general are so lively, so various, and so well portrayed, that "The Rivals" has always been a favourite resource of those who wished to shine in private theatricals.

Of Goldsmith's merry, unnatural five-act farce, much need not be said. It has faults which no critic has ever overlooked, and merits which have ever rendered it a favourite with the public.

But the personage which, among those he assumed after other players, crowned him with the most complete success, was Gradus, in Mrs. Cowley's very clever little comedy, "Who 's the Dupe?" King had been the original, but he had an engagement at Covent Garden; and it therefore fairly devolved on Bannister, who always afterward held it as his own. Gradus is an original and interesting pedant; he is devoted to literature for its own sake; he does not aspire to be the leader of a blue-stocking association,

nor does he, like the learned Trissotin of Molière, project a translation of the Æneid into Greek, for the benefit of those who do not understand Latin. When he was so far duped as to assume the semblance and phraseology of an illiterate beau, nothing can exceed the burlesque coxcombry which Bannister threw into the representation; when making love, his highest compliment was to tell his mistress that he is more proud of an interview with her, than he would be of a conference with Grævius or Gronovius; and his horror when his real Greek was beaten out of the field by a rant in English, was irresistibly comic. His appearance, so quaint and formal; his manner, so restrained and bashful; his want of confidence in everything about himself, except his learning, made a perfection of picture which the greatest of dramatic artists might have viewed with envy.

After the forty-sixth representation of "The Haunted Tower," (18th March,) he appeared in the character of Peregrine Bramble, in a farce by Mr. Morris, called "The Adventurers." Peregrine calls himself a dead hand at fun; but it would be difficult to discover a more silly, flimsy gull, or to place him in situations so absurd and unnatural as this farce displays. The piece succeeded so far as to be played seven times; but, although it was printed, and the public had full means of appreciating its

merits, neither the curiosity of the town, the enterprise of an actor on his benefit night, nor the industry of a reviver of old pieces has ever caused its reproduction.

Another new entertainment, more buoyant in merit, and crowned with complete success, was "No song, no supper," written by Prince Hoare, and acted first for Kelly's benefit, on the 16th of April. This piece, supported by the united talents of Kelly, Dignum, Suett, Bannister, Mrs. Crouch, Storace, and Romanzini, was received with cordial approbation, was often repeated, and for many years a constant favourite. Every part was most judiciously adapted to the powers and appearance of the performer; not a syllable, not a note was uttered in vain. In the incidents, for a plot can hardly be ascribed to it, there is nothing new: the old story of John Blunt and his wife, who will not bolt the outward door, but leave it to be done by the party who shall first break silence; an honest farmer whose patience and purse are exhausted by a knavish attorney; the pettifogger coming in his absence, to sup, at least, with his wife, and driven to take refuge in a flour sack; the discovery and exposure of the hidden supper and the concealed lawyer, by means of a song by Storace, which was never to be sung before a poor feast;—all these things, if soberly related or seriously discussed, would seem hardly worthy of

consideration; but, with the aid of agreeable music and exquisite acting, the objections of criticism were overruled or suppressed, and "No song, no supper," was in the highest degree popular. The part assigned to Bannister was that of Robin, a sailor, which he played in such a manner as to confirm and increase the favourable impression he had made in Ben. He knew how to be blunt without being rugged, and never contaminated his freedom of manner by grossness or vulgarity. Mrs. Crouch gave effect to the scene by two airs, after the French "Oui noir, mais pas si diable," and "Mon bon André;" Miss Romanzini was delightful in "Go, George, I can't endure you;" but Storace surpassed herself in an affecting air, formed, with great alteration, on the daily chaunt of a blind street-beggar, "With lowly suit and plaintive ditty."

This season was remarkably active, and is said to have been very profitable: in fact, neither the revivals nor the new pieces were attended with any great expense; and the performers were not more numerous than was consistent with just views of economy and propriety, without omitting a due regard to liberality. Bannister's contribution toward the general good cannot be deemed inconsiderable, since, in this single season, he performed no less than seventeen new characters.

If the Haymarket could not exactly compete with

Drury Lane, it was not deficient in activity or variety, nor was Bannister an idle member of a busy community. On the opening of the theatre, he played Young Philpot in Murphy's deservedly popular farce of "The Citizen." This youth, formed in the happiest moments of the author's imagination, is an admirable exhibition of a character not uncommon in the times when the farce was produced,—uneducated, vulgar, rash, presumptuous; spoiled by the too early power of commanding money; gay, voluptuous, inclined to the excesses and follies of fashionable life; and, from hardness of heart and selfishness, quite indifferent to the means by which he acquires funds. Every one is pleased to see him, throughout the piece, a disgraced dupe; the scorn alike of the mistress whom he pursues honourably, and the wanton on whom he lavishes his ill-gotten spoils; despised, scoffed at, cudgelled, detected, and degraded. But, with all these faults, he has a buoyant levity, and a good-humoured self-sufficiency, which, if they cannot gain pity or respect, redeem him at least from hatred and unmitigated disgust.

That we may not be at a loss for the source from which such a character could flow, the father is brought in,—a complication of avarice, fraud, ignorance, and obstinacy; a rigid miser and rapacious extortioner, yet retaining in age the follies of youth; and, while he preys on the wants and follies of others,

not sparing even his own son in a fraudulent, usurious bargain, the facile cully of a young courtesan; detected by that son, and the heir of the family with which he sought to unite him by marriage, in the lodgings of his licentious paramour, in a state of ludicrous and disgraceful concealment.

Bannister's personation of Young Philpot was one of his highest dramatic efforts; indeed it might challenge comparison with almost any performance existing or remembered on the stage. With equal skill and judgment he exhibited the chagrin of the plucked flat who, sneaking home to the city in the morning with empty pockets, laments his ill-luck at cards,—"Piqued, re-piqued, slammed and capotted every deal. Is forty-seven good?—No. Fifty good?—No, no, no, to the end of the chapter." The pert vulgarity of his ignorant exclamation,—"D— the city! I wish the papishes would set fire to it again." The character derives its greatest force from the unprincipled knavery with which he seeks to recruit his finances at the expense of his virtuous parent, by a fraudulent insurance of a ship for three thousand pounds, when he knows that the cargo is re-landed and the wreck contrived; his contemplation of a commission of bankruptcy as the best thing in the King's gift; and the hardened hypocrisy with which he affects an entire devotion to his father's sordid system, while he is defrauding him of an additional sum for the support of his extrava-

gance. A portion of this performance is judiciously described by Mr. Leigh Hunt. "If anything can excel the grave moniedness he affects in order to deceive his father, it is his description of the garret author; of that miserable pamphleteer who, holding one baby on his knee, and rocking another in the cradle with his foot, is writing a political essay with his right hand, while he occasionally turns round a scrag of roast pork with his left: during this description, the mirth of the audience becomes impatient to express itself, till, the admirable mimic having wound up his climax by a picture of the author's wife washing clothes in a corner, to the song of 'Sweet passion of Love,' it bursts into a tempestuous approbation. As this description is introduced by the author of 'The Citizen' as a mere anecdote related by Young Philpot, a common actor would have told it in a passing way, as anecdotes are commonly related. Bannister puts himself in the situation of the belaboured pamphleteer; he dandles his child, then writes a line, then rocks the other child, then writes another line, then gives the griskin a twist: his handkerchief is taken out, and he becomes the author's wife; accompanies the dabs and scrubbings of the washing-tub with 'Sweet passion of Love;' and, as its ardour grows more vehement, screams out the tender love-song to the furious wringing of her small linen."

This scene, however admirable, was not a solitary or unsupported effort. His confusion when he is baffled by Maria, both as a fool and a wit; the scene with Corinna, when, in his father's hearing, who is hid under a table, he discloses the frauds he has practised on him; his display of buckishness, when, seated on the same table, he fancies himself driving a chariot, and represents all the incidents on the road to Epsom with appropriate vulgarity; and his final mortification when, having been well-beaten, without spirit to draw his sword, he finds his father a witness of the whole transaction; all these together formed a banquet of dramatic excellence rarely equalled, and in its degree never excelled. So long as he retained the power to perform it, Bannister was never disjoined from the character of Young Philpot.

In some other new characters he made an impression, but none so deep or so permanent as in "The Citizen." He played Tobine in "The Suicide," a comedy in four acts, by the elder Colman, which had already been twelve years on the stage, without diminution or any great augmentation of his fame.

An anonymous author contributed (26th June) a lively farce called "Try again," in which Bannister acted La Fourbe, a valet, who, to forward the amorous designs of his employer, assumes several disguises,—a mason, a man-milliner, and a Walloon.

His master, Mr. Sidney, succeeds in gaining the hand of his mistress; and the piece ends, as such pieces generally do, in the happiness of the lovers and the reward of the faithful adherent. The plot avowedly is not new, the dialogue did not warrant publication, the characters have no claim to originality; but the manner in which they were played gave a moderate success to the piece.

Fabio, in a comic opera called "New Spain; or, Love in Mexico," and several other characters, some in pieces well known, and some original, may alike be passed over.

One is worthy of mention; not for its merit, but from the attempt to fit an old story to recent events. A school-boy fable of a nobleman and a basket-maker thrown among savages, where the artisan arrives at high honours by making crowns for the natives, while the nobleman, who before had despised him, is now reduced to be his dependent, and to cut reeds and grass, the raw materials of his trade, was worked up into a musical farce by O'Keeffe. In it (4th September), Bannister played Wattle, but he is not the hero of the tale; it is William, acted by a gentleman named Waterhouse, who laced himself so tight, that he looked like a water-fly. The piece, as the author tells us in his Recollections, was neither applauded, nor hissed, nor laughed at, nor cried at; "and I would have a play of mine," he

says, " either applauded to the roar, or nobly hissed off at once, and die game :—no flat wine; sweet or vinegar let it be." If this feeble farce had an aim, it was at the unhappy condition of those whom the Revolution in France had obliged to emigrate; but necessity, much more cogently than the farce-maker, brought the lesson home to their bosoms. Severely indeed was it taught, when persons, born and educated in the possession or expectation of splendid endowments, were reduced to the necessity of teaching the language of their country, or the arts they had cultivated for ornament or amusement, to obtain bread; when ladies highly accomplished, when men of learning and honourable station, were driven to sell the productions of the needle or the pencil,—to gain a subsistence by copying writing or music, or even by making list slippers or other articles of inferior utility. Whatever were the demerits of O'Keeffe's production, the charge of malignity could not be advanced against it; but, many years afterward, the same subject was seized on, and converted into a vehicle to convey unlimited contempt and abuse against all who were advanced by wealth or dignified by title. The public received it with merited contempt. I name neither the piece nor the author.

In this year the public lost one of their greatest comic favourites; one whom they had rewarded,

perhaps spoiled, with their warmest patronage. John Edwin retired from the dramatic scene in July, and from the busy stage of life on the 31st of October. His decease was not surprising or unexpected. Like too many players of low or extravagant comedy, he had supplied the demand so perpetually made on his jocularity by an unsparing use of ardent spirits. He often appeared before the public in a state which disgracefully unfitted him for his duties; but, from his ascendancy over the town, his errors were forgotten before pardon was asked: no offence from him was permanently resented. He had played some years in Ireland, and in the country, before he appeared at the Haymarket in 1777. To give an outline of his merit or manner is impossible, without analyzing his performance of several characters; but, whether he had to recite sense, wit, humour, or mere absolute nonsense, he always gained the reward for which he contended,—the cheering laugh of the public. He was always sure of applause, whether he had to utter the humour of Shakspeare, the wit of Congreve or Sheridan, or merely to sing "Tag-rag, merry derry," "Hailey, gailey, gambo railey," or "Fal de ral tit." On one of his excellences I am able to pronounce the opinion of a competent and a liberal judge. Mr. Henderson frequently declared, that in dumb action he was unequalled;

in Sir Hugh Evans, when preparing for the duel, he had seen him, for many minutes together, keep the house in an ecstasy of merriment without uttering a single word. In "Peeping Tom" he displayed the same power, in a manner quite as striking and extraordinary.

Bannister and Edwin were friends, and admirers of each other's merits. When on the scene together, the play became additionally animated from their amicable rivalship; not a contest to throw each other into the back-ground, but an earnest, artist-like effort to draw out and exhibit in all their strength their respective powers of pleasing, by each carrying to its utmost height the abilities which were possessed by the other performer. On the death of this extraordinary and eccentric comedian, Bannister said, "Alas! poor Edwin! I knew him intimately; he was a choice actor, and a pleasant club companion. His career was short and brilliant. He was a fire-work,—a sort of squib; bright, dazzling, sputtering, and off with a pop."

If the late season at Drury Lane was distinguished by peculiar vigour and spirit, that on which we are now entering was no less inanimate and torpid. The opening was for some time delayed by the death of his Majesty's brother, the Duke of Cumberland. King, after an absence of three years, returned to his station, and was received in a manner befitting

his long services, his professional merits, and his private worth.

To produce a novelty, three wits, Andrews, Reynolds, and Topham, like Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot,

—— Boldly did adventure
To club a farce by tripartite indenture.

Unfortunately for the audience, the farce was in five acts; but, fortunately for the author, and the house, the Duke of Leeds gave them a prologue, and Kemble, Palmer, Dodd, Bannister, Mrs. Jordan, Mrs. Goodall, and Miss Pope exerted all their strength to prop the feeble edifice. In the plot there was no semblance of novelty; in the characters nothing of originality; and in the dialogue very little wit or humour: such was the comedy called "Better late than never," in which (17th November) Bannister performed a proctor, with the agreeable name of Litigamus. Andrews and Reynolds, the chief undertakers, were to share the profits, but Andrews was to monopolize the renown; and Topham was to do what circumstances might require. During the first two acts the approbation was flattering, and Andrews exulted in his arrangement; in the third, the sky became overcast, the tempest howled, and the din of disapprobation was so alarming, that the two principal shareholders fled in dismay from the apparent ruin of their project; but the great exertions of the performers averted its

immediate fate. It was found, on examination, that a scene interpolated by Topham had first occasioned disapprobation: by the joint consideration of the Duke of Leeds, Sheridan, and the three authors, retrenchments and alterations enabled the piece to keep the stage nine nights, "and there an end." Andrews had to make the best of a bad bargain. with his imperceptible packet of fame; Reynolds was far more lucky, for he informs us that his gains amounted to two hundred and twenty pounds.

Cobb's "Siege of Belgrade" (1st January) was the next novelty. If not entitled to much admiration as a drama, it was in many respects fortunate. Its title alluded to the war in which the Emperor, Joseph the Second, was engaged with the Porte: the incidents, both comic and heroic, if not strictly probable, were sufficiently striking to engage and fix attention; the music was a judicious and tasteful compilation by Storace, who introduced to the English play-goer nearly all that had captivated the frequenter of the Italian opera in "*La cosa rara*;" and all the performers, having parts to which they were admirably adapted, gave them the fullest effect. Kelly acted the Seraskier, a genuine turbaned Turk, brave in war, and anxious to increase his seraglio. He has made two female captives, Katherine and Lilla, — Mrs. Crouch and Signora Storace. Colonel Cohenberg, the husband of the

former, coming in disguise to attempt her liberation, is discovered, taken prisoner, and menaced with death, but rescued by his countrymen. Leopold, the lover of Lilla, is tortured by jealousy, agreeably surprised by the discovery of his mistress's fidelity and safety, and, after being teased by her tricks and levities, is rewarded with her full and undisguised affection. This part was sustained by Bannister; and in all the scenes where love, impatience, jealousy, fear, and joy were displayed, he showed his usual ability and gained his wonted applause. In a song, endeavouring in vain to conceal his anxiety for the fate of his mistress, and his agitation at her fancied compliances with the Seraskier, and in a duet with Storace, when his alarms are dispelled, he was eminently happy. The comic part ought not to be dismissed without mention of Suett, who was a worthless Cadi, false, unjust, avaricious, dastardly, and swayed by every evil passion; nor the musical, without noticing the admirable manner in which Kelly gave "The Rose and the Lily," (*Piu bianca di giglio*, in the Italian,) and the exquisite letter-writing duet which he performed with Mrs. Crouch. Whatever may have been the literary faults of this opera, Mr. Cobb had abundant reason to triumph in its success, as it was repeated nearly fifty times.

Another novelty, "The Cave of Trophonius,"

taken from the "*Grotta di Trifonio*" of the Abbé Casti, by Prince Hoare, was handsomely presented by him to Mrs. Crouch, for her benefit (3rd May). Those who had read the Spectator (Nos. 598, 599) were prepared for a cavern which, by some undisclosed means, reduced excessive gaiety into tranquil sedateness, and depressed rational sobriety into gloomy melancholy; but, in Hoare's hands, the cave produced effects more extensive, changing every humour into its opposite. The idea was soon worked out, and Bannister in Dorilas gave the fullest effect to the author's aim. Music selected by Storace from Salieri, and the powerful aid of all the singers, male and female, procured for it a temporary existence; but it soon fell into disregard, and, being never printed, into utter oblivion.

It is barely necessary, because Bannister played a part in it, to mention "Hue and Cry," a farce translated by Mrs. Inchbald from the French; refused both by Harris and Colman, performed (11th May) for the benefit of Whitfield, damned at first sight, and never printed.

As the most conspicuous new characters that Bannister performed in pieces revived or frequently before the public, three may be mentioned. For Mrs. Jordan's benefit (22nd March), an alteration of Beaumont and Fletcher's "Humorous Lieutenant," under the name of "The Greek Slave; or,

A School for Cowards," was produced; and by some surmised, without any sufficient reason, to have been adapted by the lady herself. On the serious part of this play, it is not intended here to remark. The performance of Celia by Mrs. Jordan, the incidents to which it gave rise, and the prophetic allusion in the epilogue to her subsequent condition in life,—a matter not then in the remotest degree contemplated,—form an interesting page in her biography by Mr. Boaden. Bannister played the Humorous Lieutenant, a man who will dare everything in fight when his life is not worth retaining, but, when it is rendered comfortable, becomes very attentive to its preservation. Editors of Beaumont and Fletcher have been anxious to tell, what nobody can doubt, that the thought on which this character is founded was supplied by Horace in the second epistle of his second book; a poem, unequally, in its several parts imitated by Pope. It is added that the anecdote may also be found in " A Theatre for Wits, ancient and modern," by Thomas Forde; but, as Horace was open to Forde as well as to Beaumont, little is gained from the information. Although the Lieutenant, who has no name himself, gives a name to the play, he bears little on the plot; but the varieties of his character, the alternate hot and cold fits of his valour, his language and his conduct altogether, supplied to Bannister good opportunities of comic

display. This piece seems at one period to have been a great favourite; but its present revival, and one subsequent, by Mr. Young, did not much interest the town.

For his benefit (5th April) Bannister performed Jerry Sneak, in "The Mayor of Garratt." This piece is always a considerable favourite. The personal satire which, in 1763, attracted audiences to witness Foote's performance of the illiterate and self-sufficient fishmonger, militia officer, justice of peace, Major Sturgeon, has passed away; but still there is enough left of comic humour, and of ridicule generally applicable, to render the character popular. It also deserves to be remembered for having afforded Colonel Holroyd (Lord Sheffield) a topic of ridicule against his friend Gibbon, who had been a militia officer. The two husbands,—Bruin, a domineering ill-tempered ruffian,—and Sneak, a poor, tame, obsequious varlet,—are judiciously contrasted. If it were intended to make any comparisons of the actors who have played Jerry Sneak, it would be a task of great difficulty. From Weston to Russel, they have all made it different, and all have been successful; for, although the basis is always the same, each performer has erected upon it a varied structure of feebleness, servility, and meanness. Mr. Fox is reported to

have said, that Garrick could not look foolish enough for Marplot; and, in like manner, I should observe, that Bannister could hardly make himself sufficiently abject for Jerry Sneak.

Without the contribution of a line, or even a stage direction from the author, every performer has introduced a song according to his fancy: for example, Weston gave "Little Johnny Pringle had a little pig;" Fawcett produced "The little pigs lay without any straw;" (Smollett, in Peregrine Pickle, gives a different version—hem!) Russel sung a very good ditty about "Robinson Crusoe." All their attempts were highly successful and popular; and not less so was that of Bannister, in "What shall we have for dinner, Mrs. Bond?" In singing this ditty, he brought into play a humorous vulgarism in which he had often indulged among friends, that making of some words melodious by the introduction of letters or syllables which would twang in the nose, or flow with a ripple over the palate. For this purpose Bond was made into Bodnd; pond, podnd; killed, kiddld; and so following. The humour was successful enough, but it was common among the street ballad-singers, and the lively guests of the ale-houses, and had been before essayed on the stage; particularly in Foote's farce called "Taste," where Lady Pentweezle, the belle

of Blow-bladder Lane, gives a specimen of a lyric composed in honour of her charms, which begins,

"As I was a waddleking by side of a ridver."

Had all the other parts been feebly sustained, the under-bred, tyrannical, wanton Mrs. Sneak, as exhibited by Mrs. Jordan, would have been sufficient to secure immediate approbation and permanent favour to the piece.

On the 4th of June, "The Country Girl," and "No song, no supper," closed the season; and, from that time, the public were to be entertained and delighted in this theatre no more. It had stood its term; upwards of a hundred years; it had been frequently repaired and altered: but architects and surveyors now pronounced that they could no longer "linger and linger out the disease;" the old theatre must be removed, and a new one substituted.

All who remember the old play-house, must regret its destruction. It was little indebted to ornament; white was the prevailing colour, and gold sparingly disposed: but the audience were well assembled, the stage admirably suited to all its purposes, and every thing appeared proper, well-placed, and characteristic. Modern enterprise, mistaken for improvement, has led to a supposition that the old theatre was too small. They who in a

dramatic exhibition wish to view the natural portraiture of man in his social state, will regret that in the great theatres they are now ever doomed to see actors upon stilts, stalking unnatural distances, and delivering ordinary comic dialogue in tones adapted to the harangue of a general addressing his army. It is monstrous to see a breakfast-table at an inn or a private dwelling, in a room that looks like the vestibule of a temple; to see a cottage with the furniture and utensils so placed, that high ladders would be required to reach them; and to observe the long-delayed exits of the performers, and the distance that must be passed, before a gentleman can shake his friend by the hand or salute his mistress.

Tragedy does not gain what is lost by comedy; for there is always a relative proportion between the spectator and the scene exhibited. A stage may be too large for the eye to compass in all its parts, or for two players to fill without sense of awkward vacuity; and yet utterly insufficient, so far as magnitude is concerned, to represent Bosworth, Agincourt, or any other battle-field. In pantomime, on a stage of moderate size, at the whistle of the prompter, the whole scene changes, as if by magic; but, on a larger, the operation is slow and obstructed, like the putting about of a large vessel heavily laden. The impressive alterations of countenance, the minute by-play, and,

above all, the exquisite power of the eye, are now utterly lost; nothing remains but energetic declamation, boisterous mirth, and forced dumb-show. Even in passages where the nature of the spectacle might seem to render additional space an advantage, the effect is not always produced; thus the baronial fire, and the ox roasting whole, in "The Haunted Tower," with Bannister's comic song of "Fencers tilting, wrestlers boasting," was much more effective on the boards where it was first produced, than on the more extended floor where it was afterward exhibited. It was also of extreme importance to the interests of private life, in the high, the wealthy, and all other respectable classes, that play-houses should not exceed a moderate size. No man who knows the world, or considers the state of a luxurious and overgrown metropolis, will expect that, in a play-house, the prevention of a mixture of improper company with those who are pure and virtuous, should be enforced with a too rigid caution; but still some guard could be interposed while houses were of moderate size, which it would, at this time, be useless to attempt, and vain to expect. The dress-boxes in the old theatre were exclusively occupied by those who could sustain the appearance required at an evening party of the first character. The front-boxes, and the tier above the dress-boxes, called the green-boxes, were

filled, for the most part, with families and individuals of respectable station in life; and, if persons of character not quite so unequivocal found places in them, they were bound to the utmost propriety of demeanour. The upper boxes, or slips, were left to the females who frequent play-houses as a mart for their charms, and the tavern-haunting youths who went with the intention of becoming their customers. Such was the general arrangement; and, if it was not at all times enforced in its utmost strictness, still the benefits derived from it were perceived and acknowledged. A parent retiring either at the close of the entertainment, or at an earlier hour, had not then to conduct his wife and daughters through a lane of immodest females and licentious coxcombs. He had not, while waiting for his carriage, to witness their gambols and hear their ribaldry. The lobbies, the stairs, and all the other avenues and adjuncts to the boxes, were kept in a state of unexceptionable propriety.

The front row in the two-shilling gallery at the old theatre was, for the enjoyment of the performance, a position far preferable to any that can now be obtained at whatever price. That front seat was consecrated to the affections by the interesting narrative of Fielding; and many a time, when sitting there, I have amused myself by supposing that an elderly lady, and one much younger,

accompanied by a handsome young gentleman, might be the warm-hearted Mrs. Miller, her indiscreet, though ultimately not unfortunate, daughter, Nancy, and Tom Jones; or, when my ear has been struck with an observation in which shrewdness and *naïveté* were comically blended, I have turned sharply round, half expecting to see that curious compound of learning and ignorance, of native sense and incurable folly, the humorous barber-schoolmaster, Partridge.

In addition to such causes of regret, it could not escape recollection that there was the stage on which Garrick and his illustrious compeers had concentrated their rays of talent, where Mrs. Siddons and Kemble had commenced in London their glorious career: there were the seats from which Johnson had thundered his authoritative applause; and there the bench on which Churchill had placed himself to collect materials for his immortal criticism. Without going back to a remoter period, these circumstances were fresh in the memory of the existing generation, and were sufficient to cause a pang of sincere regret at the sentence of demolition passed upon "poor old Drury."

CHAPTER XIII.

1791—1792.

Haymarket.—The Kentish Barons, by the Hon. Francis North. —Next-door Neighbours, by Mrs. Inchbald. — The Surrender of Calais, by George Colman. — Bensley in Eustache de Saint Pierre;—Bannister in La Gloire;—Mrs. Bland in Madelon;—an Irishman introduced;—Parsons in the Gallows-builder.—Anecdote.—Observations on the language of the piece.—Mrs. Jordan plays Hippolito.—The Northern Inn.—Bannister plays Mrs. Slammekin in The Beggar's Opera.—Richard the Third. —The Drury Lane Company at the Opera-house;—prices of admission raised.—Poor Old Drury, a prelude,—described.—Revival of Cymon.—Bannister in Linco.—Charles Bannister's return.—Madame Mara in Dido.—Bannister plays Francis;—Tipple;—his benefit.—Harry Angelo plays Mother Cole;—Prologue spoken by Bannister on the occasion.—Colman's Poor Old Haymarket. — The Enchanted Wood. — The Family Compact.—Bannister plays Lazarillo, Lingo, and Peeping Tom.—Mrs. Bannister's benefit;—she retires from the stage.

LEAVING this digression, we follow Bannister to his engagement at the Haymarket, where his first new character (25th June) was Gam, in an opera by the Honourable Francis North, afterward Earl of Guildford, called "The Kentish Barons." The author possessed, by general accord, the wit, the

politeness, and the goodness of heart which distinguished his parent; and his dramatic production may, without much violence, be compared to that statesman's great measure,—the American war. It lasted for a term unexpectedly long; it was less censured by the judicious than by the factious; but it did no good to the treasury. Critics observed that it did not resemble the manners of any age in history, in its events; while an attempt to produce to view the picked shoes, fastened to the knees by chains, was decried and ridiculed. By not printing it, the author has incapacitated criticism from doing justice to his piece, if it has been wronged; but there was, in the part of Gam, nothing to advance the reputation of the performer.

Mrs. Inchbald's comedy of "Next-door Neighbours" afforded Bannister a new character, Bluntly, the honest valet of a profligate master. The piece is a combination of two French farces, "*Le Dissipateur*," and "*L'Indigent*;" its success justified the manager for performing it, but it is now too completely forgotten to warrant any detailed remark.

Far different from these, in merit and in fortune, was "The Surrender of Calais," by George Colman, produced on the 30th of July, and performed twenty-eight times before the closing of the house at the end of September. This admirable play, (it cannot be called a tragedy, nor a comedy, although

it partakes the nature and produces the highest effects of both,)—this admirable play is derived, as to the principal event, from the Chronicles of Froissart.

The event on which it is founded had before been dramatized in French, as "*Le Siége de Calais*," and from thence rendered into English; but to that translation Colman was not greatly indebted.

In the beginning of the piece, the town, after a twelvemonth's close blockade, is reduced to the extremity of famine; and, although relief for a day is obtained by the gallant enterprise of Count Ribaumont, and his trusty follower La Gloire, still, from the severe pressure of calamity, a surrender is inevitable; and, such being the terms imposed by the angry conqueror, mercy can only be granted on the condition that six self-devoted patriots, marching out into King Edward's camp with halters on their necks, and destined to immediate execution, shall deliver up the keys.

To carry on this interesting transaction, Mr. Colman has introduced a body of personages, who through three acts leave scarcely a moment which is not occupied by intense feeling, or willingly abandoned to heart-easing laughter. One of the principal characters is Eustache de St. Pierre, an old citizen, who, under a cynical outside, bears a

heart glowing with ardent patriotism, and tempered by the warmest kindness.

His son, La Gloire, a soldier from his earliest days, is an interesting and agreeable mixture of bravery, attachment, affection, filial duty, humour, and pleasantry. His mistress, Madelon, is exactly suited to him; a warm-hearted, affectionate, feeling, cheerful girl, equally disposed to partake in pleasures, or share in difficulties, "with her jolly soldier."

When the stern decree of Edward is made known, Eustache, to the surprise of all the citizens, who never suspected him of any good-will toward them, is the first to offer himself as a glorious sacrifice. He is imitated by three individuals of his own family; but still two are wanting: when Ribaumont, thwarted in love, and ill-used, as he conceives, by his mistress and her father, determines, by concealing his rank, and disguising his person, to make himself pass for a fifth citizen; and La Gloire, unable to survive the loss of his father and his commander, gives himself up as the sixth. They are all spared, at the intercession of the English queen, Philippa, and the opera terminates happily.

Greater theatrical perfection was never witnessed than in the performance of this play. Bensley, in Eustache, soared above the reach of adverse criticism; his churlish humour, when contending with

the discontented citizens, melted into the most affecting display of genuine humanity when, forgetting the exigencies brought on by three days' fast, he parted with his last morsel to relieve an unhappy creature whose darling daughter was perishing by famine. The manly firmness with which he tenders his life to save that of his fellow-citizens, and his intrepid vindication of them and of himself before King Edward, rose even to sublimity.

Bannister played La Gloire, and from the first scene to the last always delighted the audience; sometimes touching the heart with exquisite sensibility, at others provoking irresistible merriment. He is at first discovered as the attendant of Ribaumont on his perilous foraging expedition. He is justly offended at an insulting expression, that of coward; and, even when the count relents and apologises, persists in disproving the assertion by obstinately remaining fixed at the spot of danger to which he had been ordered, until his officer, after essaying all modes of persuasion and blandishment in vain, draws him from his station by simply pronouncing the word of command, "March!" Had this scene stood alone, it would have stamped the character of Bannister as a first-rate performer. His good-humoured descant upon their danger; the honourable attachment he professes to the count, mixed with a ludicrous description of his own early

service; his soldier-like resentment of the opprobrious term, and his reluctant resignation to the word of command,—all were admirable.

Mrs. Bland—for that was now the name of her who had been Miss Romanzini—played Madelon; and, in the scenes which they acted together, their mutual support produced the happiest effect. When he sees her regaling, after her long fast, on the viands he has provided; listens to her complaint that she could procure no hard peas to do penance with, for the friars had boiled and eaten them all; and when their true affection is expressed in the pretty duet, "Could you to battle march away?" the interest they create is carried to the highest pitch of pleasure. In a subsequent part, where La Gloire, having resolved to accompany his father on his fatal journey, comes to take leave; and while soothing his mistress, who knows not his destination, with the hope of a long life of happiness, he bestows on her all his worldly wealth; his suppressed anguish, contrasted with her confiding and innocent cheerfulness, form a picture in the highest degree affecting.

Many of the less conspicuous characters were admirably filled; and, if some were superadded which were not really necessary to the business of the piece, they were still calculated to increase the pleasure of the audience. According to the fashion which then began to prevail, Jack Johnstone was

lugged in as an Irishman, a servant of Ribaumont's lady, Julia. For all the use he was of in the drama, any person of any country,—a page, or the handsome little animal now-a-days called a tiger,—would have done as well; but they who heard him sing his pathetic air, "Oh! the moment was sad when my love and I parted," or his rattling rant, "When I was at home, I was merry and frisky," would find, upon reflection, that he should have owed little thanks to the critic for a fiat which had caused their retrenchment.

Another excrescence was a scene between two carpenters who had built the gallows upon which the unhappy patriots were to be executed. It is short, and rather marked by humour than wit, and (perhaps too palpably) an imitation of Shakspeare's grave-diggers. Parsons played the chief workman; and, in his hands, a scene much longer and less appropriate would never have been deemed tedious.

An incident occurred which ought to render this part particularly memorable. King George the Third had commanded and witnessed the performance. It was in Parsons's part to say "So, the King is coming: an the King like not my scaffold, I am no true man." The humorous player gave the passage quite a different turn: advancing very near the royal box, he exclaimed, "An the King were here, and did not admire my scaffold, I would

say 'D— him! he has no taste.'" This innovation, accompanied with his usual grimace and horizontal protrusion of his leg, produced an irresistible effect; and our excellent monarch, English in his tastes, his feelings, his pleasures, English in every thing, participated heartily with his subjects in the enjoyment of the actor's fun; he burst into a fit of unextinguishable laughter, and was among the foremost to applaud, and the last to desist.

A censure has been applied to the language of this opera, which can only be defended by the precedent of Shakspeare. Ribaumont, La Gloire, and Madelon ejaculate in French, "*Ah! mon Dieu*," and such-like expressions; and two of the starving citizens speak French intermixed with broken English; while Eustache and the other French personages express themselves as if they had been born in St. James's and educated at Eton. For this "there is no sound reason to be rendered;" but in "Henry the Fifth," the Constable and the Dauphin swear in French while they are discoursing in English, and poor M. le Fer and the Princess Katharine have not English enough to escape from danger and avoid indecency.

That George Colman had Shakspeare in mind when writing "The Surrender of Calais," cannot be doubted, and never was denied; but that he could imitate him in something more than his whims,

his quaintnesses, and his anachronisms, let the following lines witness. They do not rise to a level with the best specimens of the old bard; but they are sufficiently marked with his spirit and manner to acquire for the author the praise of being a spirited, and not unsuccessful imitator. Eustache says to one of the complaining citizens,

> " There roared the wrathful mouse! You sneaking braggart,
> Whom hunger has made vent'rous; who would thrust
> Your starveling nose out to the cat's fell gripe
> That watches round the cranny you lie snug in;
> Nibble your scraps, be thankful, and keep quiet.
> Thou rail on hunger! Why, 'twas hunger bore thee:
> 'Twas hunger rear'd thee; fixing in thy cradle
> Her meagre stamp upon thy weasel visage!
> And, from a child, that half-starv'd face of thine
> Has given full meals the lie. When thou dost eat,
> Thou dost digest consumption: thou'rt of those kine—
> Thou would'st e'en swallow up thy brethren here,
> And still look lean.

More passages of the same description might be produced. The female characters, Julia and Madelon, in their heroic and pathetic tenderness, are strongly imbued with the Shakspearian spirit.

For Mrs. Bannister's benefit (26th July), Mrs. Jordan, with her accustomed courtesy, appeared at a theatre to which she did not belong, as Hippolito in " She would, and she would not."

For the benefit of Mrs. S. Kemble (16th August) a comedy of her husband's was produced, " The

Northern Inn; or, The Days of Queen Bess." It is said to have been taken from Heywood's "Fair Maid of the West." Bannister played in it; but as it had no success, and remains unpublished, no observation is necessary.

Johnstone revived the absurdity (19th August) of playing "The Beggar's Opera metamorphosed;" and Bannister assisted in it, as Mrs. Slammekin.

For his own benefit (24th August) he exhibited himself in "Richard the Third." As no player was ever prejudiced by being compared with him in the character, he also may be excused from comparison.

In the distress occasioned by the destruction of their own theatre, the Drury Lane company performed at the Opera-house; permission having been liberally granted by the proprietors. Circumstances appearing to favour the attempt, an advance in the prices of admission was made, and acquiesced in without reluctance; the boxes were six shillings, the pit three shillings and sixpence. It was supposed that a less price would not remunerate the managers, and it was presumed that there would be no diminution of the audiences.

Operations commenced, on the 22nd of September, 1791, with a temporary prelude of great spirit and humour, from the pen of Cobb, called "Poor Old Drury." It is neither printed nor much remem-

bered; but the compilers of the "Biographia Dramatica" furnish a description, some parts of which well deserve to be transcribed. "Palmer and Barrymore entered, and, after lamenting the distresses of poor Wrighten the prompter, gave a very ludicrous description of the removal of the scenery from one house to the other. The ocean was washed away by a shower of rain, and the clouds were obliged to be transported under an umbrella: Alexander's triumphal car was shattered to pieces by a hackney-coach at the corner of St. Martin's Lane; and the coachman, being blamed for the accident, insisted that he was on the right side, and that Alexander, if he pleased, might take his number. Wrighten lamented his departure from poor old Drury; Parsons, in a rage, swore he could not appear in comedy again—he wanted to play in tragedy, that he might be heard. As he strained his voice, Phillimore from the gallery told him he need not "offend his lungs to talk so loud," as he could hear him very well; and the audience, not apprehending the joke, hissed poor Phillimore. Wewitzer, as a French dancing-master, observed that, according to the rule of Monsieur Demosthène, *action* was to be chiefly, or indeed alone regarded. He decried the practice of starting at the sight of the apparition, and insisted on the propriety of bowing with reverence and love, as Hamlet knows it to be the ghost of his *papa*.

This produced a very ludicrous effect; but it was not altogether new. In a work by a German traveller, named Lichtenberg, written about the year 1775, it is said that Smith, when he played Hamlet, was actually guilty of this piece of burlesque politeness, and so acquired the nickname of *Monsieur Hamlette.*

"Bland," the "Biographia" proceeds, "as an Italian singer, declares that nothing but the opera should be performed at that place; and the French critic and he retire, observing that dancing and the opera should always be together, in contempt of sense and nature. Harlequin being dismissed, because the sterling merit of the British drama would, for a season at least, be fully sufficient for the entertainment of a British audience, lamented his dismission; but, resolving to give a parting proof of his magic power, struck the scene, which rose, and displayed a view of Mount Parnassus, with Apollo and other mythological deities. The Muses appeared in succession, and the prelude concluded with airs and a fine chorus."

In general, the manager kept his promise to rely on the sterling merit of the British drama pretty faithfully. The chief departure from it was in the revival of "Cymon," (31st December,) an opera of no great merit, although not altogether void of interest, which was rendered attractive by a grand

procession of a hundred knights, and a representation of a real tournament, in which two heroes tilted on living horses. The theatre was well calculated for the effect of such a scene, better indeed than for the genuine drama; and the audience, delighted at the magnificent spectacle, acquitted Mr. Kemble of his breach of promise, crowded the house more than thirty nights, and deafened each other with shouts of applause. The piece was reproduced some years afterward with success.

Bannister performed Linco; but he had nothing to say, sing, or do, which was particularly interesting. His father, who this season, for the first time since his unfortunate voyage to the east, resumed his station at this theatre, was most cordially welcomed in Merlin, the character which had been his at the first representation of the piece.

Another departure from the manager's promise was much less fortunate. To display the powerful abilities of Madame Mara, an opera translated, or imitated by Hoare, from Metastasio's "Didone Abbandonata," called "Dido, Queen of Carthage," with a splendid masque, "Neptune's Prophecy," was produced (22nd of May) with all the strength and magnificence which could be combined; but the public, not yet sufficiently subdued to recitative and dumb-show to delight in them for a whole evening, treated this attempt so ill, that after three nights

Dido was withdrawn, for fear she should in earnest be forsaken.

These irregularities did not detract from the general character of the season; in which pieces of the highest character, by Shakspeare and other great founders of the drama, were revived, and embellished with all that the resources of the theatre could give, and supported by all the talent that the company in all its departments could produce.

In established pieces, the new characters assumed by Bannister were Francis in "The First Part of Henry the Fourth," and Tipple in "The Flitch of Bacon;" both which he played with success. For the benefits of Baddeley, Mrs. Jordan, and Dignum, he performed original parts in farces, but none of them survived long enough to merit notice.

At his own benefit (29th May) he exhibited no novelty of character. Colman lent him "The Surrender of Calais;" and he added "The Minor," in which his friend "Harry Angelo" attempted the part of Mother Cole. This gentleman, whose father, the first riding and fencing master of his time, was still alive, retained after the death of his parent, and until he was much advanced in years, the familiar juvenile appellative of Harry. He was among the earliest friends of Bannister; and his predilection for the stage, no less than his esteem for his old companion, led him to make a first appearance before a

London audience. He was not a novice on the boards, being a regular performer at Lord Barrymore's private theatre at Wargrave, and having appeared several times on the stage at Brighton. As both the Bannisters were in the house, the attempt of Angelo was bold; but he says he fortunately acquitted himself with credit, notwithstanding the fever of his spirits, and the mist which, to his optics, dimmed through alarm, appeared to envelope the whole audience. To propitiate his reception as a player, Bannister introduced him by speaking a prologue, written by George Colman, and delivered in the character of a fencing-master. As the prologue is extant only in Angelo's Reminiscences, a few lines are here preserved.

"Smile then on him who covets your applause;
Laugh is his aim, and friendship is his cause.
No tragedy he means, no scenes of death
Essays. The Fencer comes, not like Macbeth,
With murderous intent your minds to stagger
By starting after Duncan's air-drawn dagger.
Had we in Denmark's Prince resolved to drill him,
And make the young Laertes pink and kill him;
Or had he in Macduff revengeful roar'd
'I have no words, my voice is in my sword;'
In tilt and tournament, to prove his force,
Had he in Cymon mounted the black horse;—
These had been bold manœuvres. Humbler he
Makes his parade in broad low-comedy;
And hopes no guilt will lie upon his soul,
Unswordsman-like, for murdering Mother Cole."

Angelo never again appeared before a London audience.

Whether possessed by the spirit of mere imitation or of rivalry, Colman began his season (5th June) with a prelude called "Poor old Haymarket; or, Two sides of the Gutter." To compensate for his being left out of Drury Lane prelude, Bannister in this had the principal share of business. The object was to ridicule the winter theatres for the length of their seasons, which deprived the summer manager of his equitable share of patronage and profit; the overgrown size of their structures, which precluded the possibility of discerning features on the stage; and the introduction of living beasts, which threw two-legged performers into the back-ground.

Beside the prelude, some new pieces were produced, in two of which Bannister appeared. Of these the first (25th July) was "The Enchanted Wood," a mixture of mythology, fairy legend, and heroic romance; not badly written nor unkindly received, but not gifted with sufficient vigour to protract its existence beyond one season. Bannister's character was that of Owen, a cottager, who, to render his small abode more inconvenient, has encumbered himself with a wife of the largest dimensions; a wife fit to be represented by Mrs. Webb, a lady who, without any qualification but her ponderosity, once played Sir John Falstaff. His other part was in "The Family

Compact," by the Rev. Mr. Rose, one of the masters of Merchant Tailors' school; but it lived only three nights, and was never printed.

Bannister also assumed three of the characters in which Edwin had been eminently successful,—Lazarillo, Lingo, and Peeping Tom; but, as comparisons in these Memoirs are generally avoided, it is needless to descant on the inherent qualities of the intriguing barber, the Latin butler, or the over-curious weaver. In Bannister's performance, they all retained their due proportion of interest and influence; and the part of Tom was enriched by a song, afterward very popular, "The little farthing rushlight." It is hardly worth mention, but Colman seems to have contrived this ditty as a bundle of anachronisms: as a specimen; a knighted Jew keeps a coach, calls up his coachman to blow out a farthing rushlight, and it is at last accomplished by the watchman who was crying the hour, at a time when there were no such beings as Sir Solomon Simons, no coaches, no coachmen, no farthing rushlight, and no charlies. However true, all this would be perfectly contemptible if advanced seriously in criticizing a mere comic ballad.

But the interesting event of the season, as it forms an epoch in the life of Bannister, was the final retirement of Mrs. Bannister from dramatic

life. Since the year 1778, she had sustained at the Haymarket, where she first appeared, and at Covent Garden, where she was regularly engaged, the first characters in musical pieces. She was not admonished by the advance of age, or the failure of any of her powers, to quit the scene; she was impelled by other motives, cogent in themselves, and honourable to her and her husband.

To say, that in the whole of her career censure never attached to her, would, in many situations of life, be mere negative and worthless praise; but in the theatre, and to a first singer, it imports very differently. It amounts to an eulogy of which this lady was eminently deserving,—that neither pride, caprice, ill manners, or misconduct, on her part, ever afforded to the managers a topic of complaint, to busy meddlers an opportunity for scandal, or to the public a moment's cause of dissatisfaction. Her lady-like manners, her mildness and condescension, secured to her the love of the green-room; her never-failing attention to her duties conciliated the public; and the timidity apparent in her manner, the result of unaffected sensibility, never prevented the judicious, or even the less informed observer, from appreciating the correctness of her taste in dress, in speaking, and in singing,—from being charmed with the extent and sweetness of her voice,

the correctness of her ear, and the brilliancy, united with truth, which distinguished her execution.

On the 5th of September, she had for her benefit "The Mogul Tale," "Peeping Tom," and "The Agreeable Surprise." After playing with undiminished charm her original part, Laura, in the last piece, she bade a final farewell to the audience in the following lines:

"Painful the task for me which must ensue!
My heart is grateful—yet 'tis aching, too,—
While I step forth to bid you all adieu!
Full sixteen summers now have roll'd away
Since on these boards I made my first essay.
Here first your favour I aspir'd to court,
Met my fond wish—and kept it—your support.
Trembling I came; by partial favour cheer'd,
My doubt dispers'd, and I no longer fear'd:
Approv'd by you, I thought my trials past;—
But my severest trial comes at last!
Farewell, my best protectors, patrons, friends!—
To-night my labour in your service ends.
And, oh! if faintly now the voice reveals
Those struggling movements which the bosom feels,
Let the big drop that glistens in my eyes
Express that sense the faltering tongue denies.
As oft, retir'd, unruffled, and serene,
I ponder o'er the past and busy scene;
So oft shall memory pay the tribute due,
Warm from the heart, to gratitude and you!"

CHAPTER XIV.

1792—1793.

Cause of Mrs. Bannister's leaving the Stage.—Bannister's conduct with respect to her fortune.—Situation in life of Bannister,—his general character,—charm of his society,—his pleasantry in conversation. — Mr. Fladgate. — Bannister's love of Painting and the society of Painters. — Rowlandson. — Gainsborough.—Origin of two Engravings, called the French Fireside, and the English Fireside.—Bannister sits for the picture of a Dupe,—and for My Uncle Toby.—Origin of the Tour of Dr. Syntax, — and of Boydell's Shakspeare. — Clubs. — The School of Garrick.—Keep the line.—Wargrave.—Lord Barrymore's invitation to Bannister. — Drury Lane Company at the Opera-house and Colman's Theatre. — The Pirates, an opera, by Cobb, — its merits. — Bannister in Blazio. — The Cheats of Scapin.—Murder of Louis the Sixteenth. — Theatre closed by Mr. Kemble.—Anna.—Disagreement between Mr. Kemble and Mrs. Jordan. —Osmyn and Daroxa. — False Colours. — Bannister plays Grotesque, — Launcelot Gobbo, and several other characters.—The Prize; or 2, 5, 3, 8.—The Mariners, by Deputy Birch.—Haymarket.—Zach Fungus in The Commissary. —The London Hermit, by O'Keeffe. — The Mountaineers, by George Colman;—Origin in Don Quixote. — Theobald's Double Falsehood.—Johnstone in Kilmarnock. — Observations on his performance of Irish characters. — Bannister and Mrs. Bland in Sadi and Agnes.—Mr. Kemble in Octavian. — Caernarvon Castle.

In withdrawing Mrs. Bannister from the stage, her husband showed the purest principles and the

most honourable feelings. His increasing family demanded the constant care and personal attention which a virtuous and affectionate parent alone can bestow, and which Mrs. Bannister was always most ready to afford. Her perseverance in this honourable task has been rewarded in a manner, and to an extent, which they only who have the virtue to deserve it can adequately estimate.

There was another motive for her retiring, which no intimation from the managers or from the public imparted, but which arose solely from the generous susceptibility of Bannister's manly pride and affectionate feeling. Mrs. Billington had appeared in 1786, as Rosetta, at Covent Garden; Mrs. Bannister had always before been considered as the first singer in that company; but, where the new performer was, no other could claim that title. Bannister could not endure that one so dear to him should be viewed as the occupant of an inferior station. To her, had it been deemed eligible, the theatre and the concert-room always presented scenes of profitable engagement and of welcome reception; but her husband preferred a higher and more spirited determination, and would not permit her to appear as a candidate for precarious or secondary employment.

At the time of his marriage, he had settled upon Miss Harper the sum she had already realized, and

entered into a covenant that the profits of her engagements should be added until a certain sum had accumulated. When she was about to quit public life, he informed Mr. Rundle, her principal trustee, of her intention; and, that no fears might be entertained on the subject, paid in, from his own funds, the sum that was still deficient. Thus, most honourably and affectionately, did he falsify the prognostications which had been made at the time of his marriage.

At this period Bannister may be considered at the highest point of his happiness:—his reputation established; his fortune assured; blessed in all particulars in his family; in the first vigour of youth; his health unimpaired; his heart light and joyous; his mind open to every impression of pleasure; and his spirits constantly enhancing his own delight, and contributing to that of his associates. All these favourable circumstances might have failed in assuring his happiness; some of them might have plunged him into calamity and disgrace, had they not been regulated by a mind endowed with judgment, prudence, and discretion, capable of self-control, well-grounded in virtuous principles, and animated with the love of honour.

But as fools, when they seek to avoid an error, rush into the opposite extreme, it might have happened that, in so young a man, prudence would

degenerate into sordid parsimony, and avarice and rapacity be called in to aid and to disgrace economy; but, on the contrary, reason, not passion, regulating his life, Bannister always maintained an honourable and gentleman-like position. His establishment was liberal, not ostentatious; his children were well and advantageously educated; and in all the relations of life, all his kin, and every one of his friends, had cause to rejoice in their connexion with him. Mr. Boaden has given an attestation of his character, justly conceived and forcibly expressed: "Men when made up of whim, like Bannister, commonly fly out of the course, and, however diverting in their humour, secure everything but respect from the world whom they cheer. But, from my first knowledge of Bannister to the present hour, he made his prudence a guard over his festivity; and, though no man was ever more solicited in social life, his amusement neither disturbed his business nor deranged his circumstances: he could always dispense the liberal aid which he did not need; and never drew on himself, in a single instance that I remember, the displeasure of the public."

His character in social life was not less firmly or less honourably established than it was in his profession: it was the perfection of manly good sense and spirited fancy, undisgraced by any appearance of presumption or affectation. Garrick,

the head, the pride, the ornament of his profession, possessed unrivalled powers of social entertainment, and was endowed with spirits which made his society most captivating; but there was still about him an occasional reserve,—a loftiness, a magnificence of demeanour,—which was calculated to remind his associates that he, unlike them perhaps, was cordially received and familiarly adopted by persons of the highest rank and station. Bannister, on the contrary, although not inferior in native humour to his great master, although received by persons of the highest character in a manner which would have inflated a weak mind with the vapours of vanity, was always equable,—always Jack Bannister. No man was less disfigured by affectation; he never appeared above or ashamed of his profession, and often, in sportive allusion to it, dubbed himself Tom Fool."

With an inexhaustible fund of pleasantry, he was never boisterous or overbearing in his mirth; in his displays of humour, he never gave offence, for he was never personal. Wherever he came, the courtesies of social intercourse were never forgotten; the manners of a gentleman, secured on their best foundation,—unaffected gentleness,—were never out of view.

Among the friends who knew him well and examined him closely, was Mr. Fladgate, the partner

of Mr. Nield, the attorney. This gentleman, whom many remember, had a learned education, a superior understanding, and great natural talents; he was not affected, but had an oddity of manner which many would mistake for affectation, principally perhaps because, although his conversation in general was plain and modest, he would occasionally express a pungent sentiment in "words of learned length and thundering sound." I could give many instances, but one only shall be cited to close this digression. He met, in company, with one of those "pert, conceited, talking sparks," who, whatever may be the subject, pretend to more exact intelligence than any one around them. This gentleman, on every occasion, answered the last speaker by saying, "But, sir, *I happen to know.*" He had repeated this phrase a great many times, to the annoyance of the whole party, when Mr. Fladgate with peculiar dryness of manner said to him, "Sir, you really have more *fortuitous information* than any man I ever conversed with." He was the particular friend and constant companion of George Colman.

Speaking of Bannister, Mr. Fladgate made these observations. "The dullest, and consequently the most tedious half-hour to which we are exposed, even in the most polished families, is that which elapses in the drawing-room before the announce-

ment of dinner. I have seen my old and worthy friend, Jack Bannister, arrive on such occasions, when the ladies and gentlemen were looking vacantly at each other, not venturing to begin a conversation, lest it should be interrupted by the entrance of a servant with the desired intelligence, 'Dinner is on the table.' On his appearance every cloud was dispelled; some frolic, some humorous dissertation, or some playful dialogue which he would invent and carry on, perhaps with an article of the furniture, put an end to all impatience, and even made the company wish that the serving-up of dinner might be postponed."

His early pursuit of painting proved, not only a pleasure, but an advantage to him in life. In fact, although the art was relinquished as a profession, it formed one of his principal delights; and his knowledge and invention were of use, not to the artists alone, but to the managers and performers with whom he associated. He has been known to say, that this predilection was always productive of a large portion of happiness. His acquirements under De Loutherbourg, although not regularly his pupil, aided by his own taste, knowledge and experience, made his advice of high value; and caused it to be frequently asked for, by managers, on the scenery, the costume, and what is generally termed the getting-up of new pieces.

His love for the society of artists was always conspicuous. Rowlandson and Morland were, from his youth, his constant friends; and in the study of Gainsborough he passed those hours which he reckoned among the most agreeable of his recreations. When the great artist was in town, their meetings were almost daily; and, when Bannister visited Bath, the house of his friend was to him a home.

Gainsborough was distinguished by great simplicity of character, and was not less fond of fun and frolic than his valued friend. When Bannister had carried the exercise of his faculty for pleasantry to its most extravagant height, he would often check himself with "Well done, Tom Fool!" "Jack," said Gainsborough, on one of these occasions, "if I die first, you will have a legacy,—my cap and bells; for certainly your own will, ere long, be clean worn out. That nature intended us both for monkeys, is certain; but pray, who taught you to play the fool so well? Was it your old tutor, Davy Garrick?"—"No," said Bannister, "it was old Mother Nature,—she who put the pencil into your hand, and made you a painter."

It may here be observed, that the use of the sportive appellation, "Tom Fool," was never abandoned by Bannister. I find a memorandum in one of his diaries, dated the 5th of June 1826, when he

was at Ross, on a visit to his son John, in these terms. "After dinner, yesterday, took a boat with Jane, John, and little Charles, (his daughter-in-law, his son, and grandson,) and had the impudence to introduce myself to the ladies at Wilton Castle. My name brought me through. Mrs. Hills and her sisters showed us the castle and the grounds, which are very romantic and pretty. They said I had given them great pleasure professionally some years back. Who would not be a Tom Fool?"

Such were the levities by which his intercourse with artists was distinguished; but, on some occasions, his ideas were so communicated as to be of use to the individuals to whom he imparted them, and even of general importance. Two extremely clever caricatures, as they are popularly called, but I should rather term them satirical delineations of society, appeared about fifty years ago, under the names of an English and a French fireside. In the former, gentlemen were displayed crowding the hearth, turning their backs to the blaze, and elevating their coat-tails to gain the full influence of the warmth; while ladies were shivering and shuddering in a distant part of the room. In the other, the ladies, not quite attentive to what we consider decency in the disposal of their lower apparel, monopolized the fire; while poor chilly beaux, with both their tongues and teeth chattering, and keeping up a

little circulation by the aid of muffs, appeared to be uttering gallantries and dispensing small talk without a chance of gaining the least warmth from the burning coals which flared cheerfully only to tantalize them. These engravings, which were eminently successful, originated in two pen-and-ink drawings made by Bannister.

Another engraving, which was equally favoured, owed to him its origin. His friend and fellow-student Rowlandson was, unhappily, much addicted to games of chance, and Bannister used to remonstrate with him on the subject with amicable but ineffectual perseverance. On one of these occasions, John Raffaelle Smith, the engraver, admonished Bannister on the inutility of his efforts. "You may spare your sympathy and advice also," he said; "for that Tom Rowlandson was, is, and ever will be incurable." The artist, in merry revenge, brought out a print called "Hawks and a Pigeon," in which Smith, endowed for the occasion with a most villanous aspect, the very personation of a sharper and a knave, exhibited conspicuously.

By way of reprisal, Smith produced a well-known and popular engraving, in which Rowlandson and some others are represented as confederates in fleecing an innocent. Bannister lent his aid in forming the group; and putting on, for the occasion, a face from which all appearance of sense was effectually

banished, sat for the young dupe. Parsons, on seeing the production, said, "Why, Jack! you are the last of our fraternity that I should have selected as the model of a flat. Why, when you were little Cupid in the green-room, Kitty Clive, who was not apt to mince matters, used to say you looked as innocent as a little sucking devil."

Far different must Bannister's aspect have been, and much more truly a representation of his real self, when, on the 7th of August 1830, he sat to Mr. Leslie for a model of the most warmly beloved and highly respected of all our fictitious relations, the honourable, benevolent humorist, my Uncle Toby. The picture is known to the public by a well executed engraving. It exhibits the unsuspecting warrior led into an ambuscade, by being called on to inspect the eye of the amorous widow Wadman.

Of another graphic series, which owed its existence almost entirely to the invention of Bannister, I have the following account. Dining at a tavern, with him and a third person, Rowlandson was asked, "What are you about, Rolly?"—"Why, nothing in particular," he said; "I think my inventive faculty has been very sluggish of late; I wish one of you would give me a hint."

Being asked of what kind? he answered, "I feel in a humour to sketch a series, where the object may be made ridiculous without much thinking. I have

been making a tour in Cornwall and Devonshire with a friend, who, as I have made sketches on the coast for him, wishes me to introduce adventures at inns, and other comic incidents, in which he was the principal party. But what can I do for such a hero? A walking turtle,—a gentleman weighing four-and-twenty stone,—for such scenes he is quite out of the question. I want one of a totally different description;" and he named a celebrated tourist, who, by a recent publication, had given much celebrity to the Lakes.

"I have it!" said Bannister: "you must fancy a skin-and-bone hero, a pedantic old prig, in a shovel-hat, with a pony, sketching tools, and rattletraps, and place him in such scrapes as travellers frequently meet with,—hedge ale-houses, second and third-rate inns, thieves, gibbets, mad bulls, and the like. "Come!" he proceeded, warming with the subject; "give us a sheet of paper, and we 'll strike off a few hints." The paper was produced, Bannister gave his ideas, Rowlandson adopted them, Coombes explained them by a well-written poem; and to this conversation, and to the lively invention of Bannister, the public is indebted for a highly favoured publication, "The Tour of Dr. Syntax."

A work of much greater importance,—one on which the talents of the most eminent artists were employed to raise a memorial worthy the first of

poets,—the Boydell Shakspeare,—owed its origin to a party of which Bannister was a member; and in the perfection of the pictures he might claim a certain share.

He was a member of a select society, composed altogether of artists and theatrical performers, who were used to meet and dine at different coffee-houses, discussing at large whatever was interesting in their respective pursuits. At one of these meetings, the idea was started of an united effort to be made by the most celebrated painters for the formation of a combined tribute to the poet, who was justly the pride of the nation, and whose scenes and characters had so often furnished subjects for eminent artists. This project, after it had formed the subject of various discussions, was communicated to Alderman Boydell, who adopted it with eagerness, pursued it with alacrity and spirit, and finally rendered it a grand national object. A more lively interest was imparted to the public than had ever been created by a similar undertaking; an interest which was never intermitted, whether attention was directed to the exhibition of the pictures, the perfection of the engravings, or the progress of the work.

Bannister bestowed on it a devoted attention. It has been asserted, that there was not a picture in the protracted series, of which he had not witnessed the

rise and perfection. He was acquainted with the painters, enamoured of their art and of the subject, accurate in his notions of beauty and grace, and by his dramatic skill capable of supplying those personations, attitudes, and expressions of feature, which would so materially assist the imagination, and give life to the production.

Adverting to the society in which this plan of publication originated, leads to the mention of a mode of social life, then of general and promiscuous resort, called Clubs. These societies formed the scenes of some of Bannister's happiest convivial moments. Clubs were, in those days, conducted on the principle that, when once a member, every gentleman was received by all on the footing of an acquaintance, joined in conversation without further introduction, and formed one of a joint-stock company of good-fellowship. Now, I am told, a different system prevails,—"*le collége a changé tout cela;*" and a member of a modern club is no more, as matter of course, acquainted with the individual who sits opposite or next to him, than with the man who meets or overtakes him in Bond Street, or jostles him in Cheapside.

One club, of which Bannister was a distinguished member, was "The School of Garrick." This association was formed by those who had been contemporaries of that great performer; but, as death

thinned their numbers, they replenished them with individuals well qualified to keep rank with those who had enjoyed the original enviable distinction. The meetings were limited to the winter theatrical season, and occurred only once in a month. "It was, of all societies I have ever been in," Kelly says in his Reminiscences, "perhaps the most agreeable: nothing could surpass it for wit, pleasantry, good-humour, and brotherly love." Could it be otherwise, when among the founders were King, Dodd, Moody, Parsons, and the two Bannisters; and among the new members, Mathews, Suett, and Dowton? But, as nothing of the school of Garrick now exists, Time may be said to have extinguished the club; over the fame of Garrick Time has no power.

Another club, of which Bannister was a member, was held weekly, and called "Keep the Line." It is said to have increased rapidly in popularity, but cannot have lasted very long. The members were calculated, so far as names go, to make a sparkling circle; but their principal recorded rule would speedily exhaust curiosity by its effects, and extinguish wit and humour by its repetition. It is stated by those who belonged to it to have been, that if any member insulted another, by giving him the lie, or otherwise grossly provoking him, the member insulted was to satisfy the aggressor by

immediately asking his pardon; and visitors were subjected to the same rule. A gentleman once, showing the improvements he had made in his grounds to a friend, brought him to a spot where an unexpected, but not advantageous, piece of scenery broke in upon them. "Now," said he, "will not this be delightful to a person who sees it for the first time?"—"It may," his friend answered; "but what will it be when he sees it a second?" A gentleman may for once be astonished, and suppress his displeasure at receiving the lie or any other insult, or may for once enjoy the surprise of a stranger who is tried with such a *mauvaise plaisanterie*; but repetition must render the jest flat and disgusting. It is, with respect to the mind, what practical joking is to the person; a successful experiment may produce a laugh, but can never be permanently agreeable. In Tom Shadwell's comedy of "Bury Fair," one Sir Humphrey Noddy, a practical joker, details at much length the tricks he has played on divers grave and reverend individuals, and enlivens the performance by playing off pleasantries according to these stage directions: "He plucks the chair from under Trim, and gives him a devilish fall."—"Sneaks behind, and pins Oldwit and Wildish together."—"Gives Trim a devilish kick on the shins." Several other witticisms of the same kind occur; but, in the play, the joker, ac-

cording to poetical justice, has his head broken, and the author derived from the piece neither emolument nor fame.

It seems that a farce, something in idea like "Keep the Line," was sometimes played off at Wargrave, during the time of the eccentric and extravagant Earl of Barrymore. His brief career in life brought on him much public notice: his accidental and untimely death occasioned no more feeling than must be effected by the sudden dissolution of so young a man; no one lamented it as a diminution of the resources of eligible society, or the frustration of any well-founded hope. Bannister was occasionally a visitor at Wargrave, but never permitted himself to be initiated in the gross scenes of prodigality and debauchery which assimilated it to the court of Comus. That he was held in kind regard, and, what was not extended to many, in sincere respect, by the eccentric Earl, the following letter will show. It is an invitation; but couched, although in free, yet not in the indifferent terms which would be used toward a daily familiar, whose presence was required, but whose ease or comfort was not regarded. The request with which the postscript concludes, shows that his lordship possessed, in no slight degree the best art of a courtier,—that of asking favours in the easiest and most taking manner.

" DEAR BANNISTER,

" The Duke of Cumberland being dead,—(N.B. In the original, his Royal Highness is called by a coarse *sobriquet*, not necessary to be printed,)—and your theatres shut on that account. You will make me very happy if you will come down for a day or two this week. Our plays are Tuesday, Thursday, and Saturday; 21st, 23rd, 25th. You can have no excuse, my good boy; so pray let us see you. You shall have the great bed, and every other necessary commodity. I dare say you are in high spirits at this national misfortune, for now it 's all holiday with you. Ah! friend; all work and no play makes *Jack* a dull boy.

" Ever yours sincerely,

" BARRYMORE.

" I assure you our theatre is really elegant.

" (Turn over, for God's sake!)

" We play 'Try again,' the last night of our performances; you would oblige me exceedingly if you would procure me the dress you wore, and also the Walloon uniform, which I will take great care of, of Colman."

But to return to the theatre. The Drury Lane company performed, at the beginning of the season, at the King's Theatre; but, when the opera season commenced, they were obliged, on Tuesdays and

Saturdays, to seek refuge at Colman's, on the opposite side of the street. The first new character in which Bannister appeared was (24th November) Blazio, in "The Pirates," an opera by Cobb. Storace composed and selected the music, and the piece was played many times: but its whole attraction was derived from the scene-painters, who produced some of the most brilliant effects of their art; the composer, who arranged music of great sweetness and powerful effect; and the performers, who rose to the extreme height of their genius both in acting and singing. Of the melodies, one sung by Signora Storace, with the burden "Lullaby," was most extensively—it might almost be said, universally—popular. One by Sedgwick, "There the silver'd waters roam," was always heard with applause, and often repeated in society by those who had no pretension for the attempt, except the school-boy faculty of remembering the words. But it should not be forgotten that a song by Kelly, in a scene where for the purposes of the piece, he was disguised as the master of a galantee-show,—

"We the veil of Fate undraw
In our lanterna magica,"—

supplied the wits who wrote "The Anti-Jacobin" with a tune for their renowned "U-niversity of Gottingen."

Blazio was a character of life, bustle, and ac-

tivity; faithful in attachment, sincere in love, brave in safety, and timid in danger. Bannister did for it all that could be achieved, and it played out as well as any other card in the pack.

Molière's farce, "*Les Fourberies de Scapin*," translated by Otway as an appendage to "Titus and Berenice," with little alteration, had been performed, at intervals, from the days of Charles the Second, when it first appeared. Bannister this season (4th January) played the false, tricksy hero of the piece. It is a character full of bustle and business; but the deceits practised by Scapin are too gross, the parties imposed upon too stupid, to afford much pleasure. In the French, there is a lightness of phrase, and a peculiarity of expression, adapted to the genius of the audience, the effect of which can only be felt, not described. "What a devil had he to do on ship-board?" is not a correct translation; but a more faithful one would not excite the same sensation of fun and drollery that arises from "*Que diable alloit-il faire dans ce galère?*" The trick of putting an old man into a bag and beating him, has never been viewed with satisfaction. Boileau, although a hearty admirer of Molière, thinks that this paltry contrivance quite debases him from his proper level. He says,

> "Dans ce sac ridicule, où Scapin s'envelope,
> Je ne reconnois plus l'auteur du Misantrope?"

Before Bannister appeared in any other character, a tragedy was acted in Paris which wrung every feeling heart in Europe,—the murder of Louis the Sixteenth, by his subjects, in sight of his own palace. When kings fall by the hand of assassins, horror is limited to the fact, and indignation is confined to the individual who perpetrates the crime, or the sect or division of society who urge its commission. But the murder of Louis was a national act; the representatives of the whole people commanded, and the whole people sanctioned, the unjust and savage deed. England has to lament that in her annals an atrocity of similar kind is recorded; but the distinctions are highly in favour of our national character. Charles the First was treated with a gentleness, consideration, and humanity, which left the iniquitous public proceedings against him entirely a distinct atrocity. Viewing fairly the comparative treatment of the fallen sovereigns, it may justly be said that the puritans of England were not, in any respect, reduced to so low a level as the atheists of France.

When the news of this horrible event arrived, (24th January,) Mr. Kemble closed the house for that evening. Mr. Sheridan is said to have disapproved the proceeding, as introducing politics into the theatre. If he ever expressed such a sentiment, it was surely not from hard-hearted indifference to

the fate of the unhappy victim; he felt for him as much as any man, and, whatever were his party attachments, he, like every gentleman who could afford the cost, put himself into mourning on the occasion.

In several pieces, of which the success did not compensate for the cost and labour of preparation, Bannister bore his part; alternately roasting in the glowing heat of immediate condemnation, and freezing under contemptuous neglect. One conspicuous instance of the first catastrophe was exhibited in a comedy called "Anna," by Miss Cuthbertson, produced, (2nd February,) Mr. Boaden says, to gratify Mrs. Jordan, contrary to the judgment of Kemble. It was performed once, advertised for a second representation, withdrawn, and "The Country Girl" substituted; and then heard of no more, either on the boards or in print.

It may just be observed, that at this time no cordial good-will subsisted between Kemble and Mrs. Jordan; they had no direct disagreement, but their little bickerings were often noted, to the amusement of the public. One of these arose on a new printing, not a new reading, of the play-bills. It had long been the custom to place the name of the principal male and of the principal female performer at the bottom of the list, preceded by the word "*and*," in a line by itself. Kemble reformed this practice;

Mrs. Jordan pouted; the newspaper wits took up the point, and printed jokes, which I dare not repeat, on the grammatical denomination of the word omitted. Nor was it forgotten to inform the public, that Mrs. Jordan was a widow, whose husband had been killed in the battle of Nubibus. If Kemble felt any pleasure from this contest, he probably underwent a different sensation when his friend, subsequently his biographer, Mr. Boaden, produced (7th March) his first dramatic essay, "Osmyn and Darara." This piece is derived from an episode in the clever, and once admired, romance of Aleman, "Guzman d'Alfarache; or, the Spanish Rogue." The story is interesting; and the songs, as Mr. Sheridan told the author, were better than any that had been written since "The Duenna." Nobody will doubt Mr. Sheridan's judgment; his sincerity is not quite so unquestionable. Bannister played a part in this piece; but, as it only lingered out five miserable nights, the merit or the effect of his performance is not recorded.

Not very different was the fate of a comedy called "False Colours," written by Mr. Morris, afterward, in consequence of his connexion with Lord Erskine's family, a Master in Chancery, in which Bannister performed (3rd April) Grotesque.

To this list of unimportant characters the addition might be made of Roger, in a revived farce,

called "The Ghost;" Jacob, in "The Chapter of Accidents;" Launcelot Gobbo, in "The Merchant of Venice," (5th March,) when Kemble played Shylock; and Bombardo, in the "Female Duellist," a feeble farce, derived from Beaumont and Fletcher. The latter part was played for Whitfield's benefit; and for that of his father (22nd May), Bannister took a ticket equally unproductive in "Fortune's Wheel," (not the Wheel of Fortune,) which barely appeared, to be proclaimed a blank, and was heard of no more.

A-propos to the lottery, and to quit the subject of unsuccessful pieces. On the 11th of March, for the benefit of Signora Storace, "The Prize; or, 2,5,3,8," a farce by Hoare, was produced, and became a permanent stock-piece of the theatre. The plot is slight and trivial. Lenitive, an apothecary in a country town, has for a patient Mr. Heartwell, whose greatest complaint is a passion for Caroline, which is thwarted by her father. This prudent parent is disposed to bestow her on the apothecary, supposed to be enriched by a capital prize in the lottery, and who has, in consequence, given up business to his assistant. Caroline, by personating an imaginary cousin of her own, induces Lenitive to renounce the intended match; the pretensions of Heartwell are sanctioned by her parent, and the apothecary's prize turns out to be a mistake.

On this slight basis was founded one of Ban-

nister's best and most effective displays. He appeared, as Lenitive, preparing to pursue his daily avocations, when a letter by the post, from a lottery-office keeper, informs him in the first paragraph that one of his tickets is drawn a blank; but it is added that another, No. 2,5,3,8, is a prize of ten thousand pounds. The first information of the blank was received with an appearance of self-consolation, and a struggle to appear indifferent. "A blank—humph!—well! Worse luck now, better another time!" but the other part produced a momentary stupor, followed by a complete intoxication. The intelligence was read over and over with a variety of tones and pauses, the fortunate number impressed on the memory, and the whole man seemed to undergo a complete revolution. In pursuance of his duty, he visits his patient Heartwell; but so completely absorbed, that his prize and his ticket burst from his tongue as a spontaneous effusion, in answer to every observation and to every question. "Take your drops," says Lenitive. "What number?" Heartwell inquires. "Number!" the apothecary replies; "number two thousand five hundred and thirty-eight."—"Zounds!" says the patient, "I shall be all day counting them."

From this state of absorption, he revives into a more matured consciousness of his opulence, and determines that his assistant shall be his successor, and

himself an accomplished beau. He obtains a dress, not merely in the extreme of fashion, but beyond all imaginable extremes; and, so provided, sets out to court the fair Caroline. This young lady, after much expense of daughter-like reasoning, prevails on papa to permit an experiment, to show Lenitive in his natural colours—of a shallow, selfish coxcomb, who will renounce her, if he has the prospect of a richer heiress. Accordingly, in a disguise of ultra-Parisian finery, she is introduced as a cousin of Caroline, just arrived from France, where she has been educated; and whose charms and wealth may be added to the prize which Lenitive has already obtained. Storace performed this part; and, in their interview, she and Bannister vied in drawing out each other's powers. She was vain, airy, frivolous, and presumptuous; he, confident, alert, and adventurous,—continually struggling against his inveterate shop-keeping habits and professional dialect, and endeavouring, by mere impudence and bold guess-work, to answer in English, phrases uttered in French, without the slightest conception of their meaning. This gave rise to a series of quibbling jokes, made endurable only by the peculiar manner in which the actor could blend the greatest archness with perfect *naïveté*. And when, fatigued with his unceasing allusions to chemicals and galenicals, the lady exclaims, "*Mais il parle toujours de médé-*

cine !" it is impossible to describe the mournful comicality of his impatience in saying, aside, "D—me, I am nailed to the counter, like a bad shilling."

His rapture with the fascinating foreigner is carried to such a height, that, without scruple, he renounces all claim on Caroline; but in the end,—for, however undesired at the moment, an end must come,—in the end, another letter arrives from London, to dispel poor Lenitive's illusions, and close his follies. The former was the mistake of a clerk in the lottery-office; and 2, 5, 3, 8, is not a capital prize, but one of far inferior denomination. In this part, Bannister exhibited peculiar excellence: it was among his very best.

For the sake of the author rather than the actor, it may be mentioned here, that, for Sedgwick's benefit (10th May), Bannister performed a part in an afterpiece called "The Mariners." This farce was written and presented to Sedgwick by Samuel Birch, Esq., then generally called, from his station in the corporation of London, Deputy Birch; well known by some literary productions, and still more by his exertions at the City meetings, which, being always on the side of loyalty, and in opposition to the frenzy of faction, procured him the respect of that class of society whose esteem he coveted, and the rancorous hatred of the disloyal, or, as they

were then termed, the Jacobins. "The Mariners" was his first, but not his only dramatic essay; it had a moderate success.

Bannister's first new character at the Haymarket was Zach Fungus, in Foote's farce, "The Commissary." The outline of this ignorant fellow become rich, is taken from "*Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*" of Molière; but, to give it additional force before an English audience, Foote deprived his upstart of the innocence which *(à ses amours près)* the French author left undisturbed in Mons. Jourdan, to bring to view one of that tribe whose fangs

"A whole nation have felt, and for ages will feel."

Ignorance, coarseness, and vulgarity, seeking unattainable accomplishments, derided and grossly duped, form the whole sum of this character. It excites a laugh while present, and is dismissed with contempt, because hatred would do it too much honour.

O'Keeffe furnished the first dramatic novelty of the season (29th June), "The London Hermit; or, Rambles in Dorsetshire." Some of the characters were drawn by him from individuals he encountered in a trip to that county in 1791. His own observation in life, some reading in novels and the lighter parts of literature, and the peculiar talents of the actors, which no man could better turn to advan-

tage, supplied the residue of the characters and the story. It was, like all the author's productions, open to criticism on all sides, and yet so contrived as to give pleasurable feeling to the heart, and make "the lungs to crow like chanticleer" in every scene. The leading outline of this piece, derived from an advertisement which actually appeared in the public prints, represents an over-wealthy East Indian, who has purchased, and at an immense expense beautified, an estate, offering a liberal present compensation, and a considerable annuity, to any man who will engage to live five years in a cell on his grounds as a hermit. Bannister played a young man, full of life, spirit, and whim; the slave of every momentary impulse, although governed by a good heart, who has run through all his present means, is inextricably involved in debt, and has escaped from the rules of the King's Bench prison. To him the hermitage seems at once a refuge and an acquisition, and he accepts the offer in the advertisement. But, so impossible is it to conquer nature, every accident that occurs furnishes an occasion to forget his assumed, and display his real character. He quits the grot to gallop a pony and win a cup; he tortures an unhappy Irish orator, who is engaged to show the curiosities; he makes love to an interesting young girl, and endures the advances of an intolerable old woman. His beard and gown are hardly ever worn;

but so high are his spirits, that, even when alone, he mounts the table to ride an imaginary race. He is too much controlled by honourable feeling to permit that an innocent man shall be lodged in gaol instead of him; he assists a friend to gain an heiress who is intended for his own wife; and he generously devotes himself to an humble but innocent and amiable female, named Kitty Barleycorn, with whom he has formed an accidental acquaintance. This varying character was admirably performed by Bannister; his never-failing vivacity, his perpetually changing humour, his activity, versatility, and bustle, imparted to it a charm probably far beyond the author's conception. He was ably supported in the auxiliary characters. Mrs. S. Kemble, with all the sweetness, gentleness, and propriety which distinguished her, made Kitty perfectly fascinating. Johnstone's Irish gardener,—called Tully, it may be supposed, because he is the Cicerone of the place,—was irresistibly entertaining. His confusion in detailing the beauties, the most perfect idea of botheration ever displayed, gave no respite to the mirth of the audience. A character was introduced, called Barebones, a Methodist preacher, informer, pedlar, money-lender, broker, and old-clothes man. This individual finds his way into Dorsetshire, and, in pious zeal to "disbolish groves and idols," overturns the nabob's

statues and plucks up his exotics; this thought is taken from the Spiritual Quixote: the whole part afforded excellent scope to the talent of Wewitzer. It is said that the piece had more success than it deserved; they who have only read it are justified in thinking so: if they could see it performed in its original strength, all desire to criticize must be absorbed in sensations of pleasure.

But the great achievement of the season, a production, indeed, which carried the fame of the younger Colman to its greatest height, and which forms a striking feature in the English drama, was "The Mountaineers." The plot is taken from the story of the Captive, and the adventures of Cardenio, in Don Quixote. The latter incidents had already been dramatized by Theobald in "The Double Falsehood;" a play which he gave to the public as Shakspeare's, and which some attributed to Beaumont and Fletcher, some to Massinger, others to Shirley. It was performed twelve times, and published with a dedication to Mr. Dodington. It might have descended quietly to posterity, with the chance of occasional revivals: but the author having unluckily, although with irresistible truth, demonstrated Pope's incapacity as an editor of Shakspeare, he joined with his associated wits in making "The Double Falsehood" a subject of ridicule; and, in the early editions of "The Dunciad,"

placed the author on the throne of dulness, until, in a fit of after-born resentment, he dethroned Theobald, and installed Cibber in his stead.

To Theobald's play Colman does not appear to owe the slightest obligation. His captive, Virolet, with all his adventures, is entirely his own in the play, although derived from the novel. The father of the Moorish lady Zoraida, is drawn with much strength. He has not the avarice or the cruelty of Shylock; but in religious bigotry, and ardent, although rugged domestic affection, he enters into some degree of comparison with the Jew of Venice. He was admirably delineated by Bensley. The escape of the Moorish lady and her lover is given as in Don Quixote, but the stage must be better peopled than the pages of a romance need to be: Zoraida has therefore a faithful Christian slave named Agnes, who has a Moorish lover called Sadi; while Virolet, as an attendant and faithful friend, possesses Kilmarnock, an Irishman; and all these effect their escape together. A play, a farce, an interlude, a pantomime, or any other piece, let the scene be laid where, and the time fixed when, the author pleased, could hardly at that period be brought on the stage without an Irishman. This was a severe task upon Jack Johnstone, but it was entirely his own doing: he played, he looked, he sung the character so admirably; he exhibited so

much true feeling, and such spontaneous fun, that it seemed almost a fraud upon the audience, in any house where he was engaged, to exclude him from a piece in which there could be a pretence for introducing him. The cavils of criticism; its great words,—such as anachronism,—incongruity, however ably enforced or authoritatively sounded, were lost and drowned amid the torrents of delight and thunders of applause which always attended this unrivalled performer. Place an Irishman in India, in Calais, in Granada, or the Sierra de Ronda, if Johnstone were that Irishman, the criticism of the audience, like the love ecstasy of Horace when he wrote *Pone me pigris*, &c., forgot all difficulties of place and climate; and, if he had made his entrance on an uninhabitable island, he would have been cordially welcome.

Bannister and Mrs. Bland were the Moor Sadi, and the Christian Agnes, who both, from their attachment to their lady Zoraida, and to each other, follow fortune with her and Virolet. These two performers were always happily placed when an innocent and virtuous affection, mixed with a little comic oddity, was to be presented; and in "The Mountaineers," they were admirably suited. Their sportive quarrels, their little emotions of jealousy, their distress when wearied in the mountains, their

joyous revel at the goatherd's door, displayed the talents of both in high perfection, and contributed much to the success and permanent popularity of the opera.

But these were feeble luminaries, compared with the glorious sun which, in the person of Kemble, broke forth in Octavian. This character is, in all respects, poetical, interesting, affecting. How Kemble was struck with it in an early outline,—how, at a great sacrifice of his pecuniary interest, he made it his own,—and what were the excellences of his performance, I am not required to relate. In a work to which they are more peculiarly appropriate, the Memoirs of Kemble, by Mr. Boaden, all these circumstances are detailed with minuteness, fidelity, and judgment. I cannot transcribe his criticism; it is too long for a work to which it does not particularly appertain, and to abridge it would be unjust and useless. In the short period between its first appearance (3rd August), and the closing of the theatre (14th September), affording not more than thirty-six days of performance, this piece was played six-and-twenty times.

On the 12th of August, as a compliment to the Prince of Wales, an opera in two acts, entitled "Caernarvon Castle," was produced, and Bannister had in it a part called Adam de Francton. This

compliment, like many others offered to the great, contained more words than meaning: it was heard with indifference, if not distaste; its repetition was not desired, and it left no trace on the memory.

CHAPTER XV.

1793—1794.

Extra season at the Haymarket.—The Children in the Wood.—Mrs. Bland in Josephine.—Bannister in Walter.—Suett in Apathy.—Bannister plays Colonel Feignwell,—Marplot,—Lissardo,—Captain Brazen,—and Gregory, in the Mock Doctor.—My Grandmother.—Bannister in Vapour.—Suett in Dicky Gossip.—Heigho for a Husband.—The Purse.—Bannister in Will Steady.—The Box-lobby Challenge.—Wives in plenty.—Three pieces played by command of their Majesties.—Fatal accident at the theatre.

As the new theatre in Drury Lane was not completed in time for the season to commence at its usual period, and as it was necessary to keep together the strength of that company, an expedient was devised, and put in practice with perfect success. The managers lent their patent to the younger Colman; and he began an extra season at the little theatre, which was opened five days after the termination of its accustomed performances (19th September), with the ever popular and attractive "Mountaineers." The company included many, but not all, the leading performers of Drury Lane;

for Mrs. Siddons, Miss Farren, Mrs. Jordan, Miss Pope, King, Palmer, Dodd, and Wroughton, were not engaged.

In this irregular season was produced (1st October) "The Children in the Wood," a drama in which Bannister displayed all his powers, and rose to the highest pinnacle of his dramatic excellence. Mr. Morton, already known to the public as the author of an Irish song in one of his friend Reynolds's comedies, and by a piece of his own, called "Columbus," formed a piece in two acts, from the ancient ballad of the cruel uncle who murders his brother's children in a wood that he may inherit the family estate. The story is generally known; but Mr. Morton judiciously varied the catastrophe, saving the children and restoring them to their parents.

Walter, the character assigned to Bannister, is a carpenter, and the lover of Josephine, the *bonne* of the two children. Mrs. Bland performed this part; and as the celebrated Josephine, or her more tremendously celebrated husband, Napoleon, had not yet risen above the political horizon, no comparison was made to throw ridicule on the good-natured, affectionate nursery governess. Walter and she prattle on in their innocent love, with all the affectionate drollery which they knew so well how to render interesting. The uncle, Sir Rowland, having planned the murder of the two innocents, under

pretence of sending them on a visit to another relative, has engaged a bloody, ferocious ruffian, named Oliver, to execute his horrible design. Apprehensive, however, that some accident may render assistance necessary, he communicates his plan to Walter, who, with the most benevolent intentions, appears to adopt it. In this scene Bannister had to display the generous but subdued workings of a feeling heart, and the awkward simulation of an honest man who compels himself to appear a villain.

In a gloomy part of the forest, Oliver, declaring the place to be suitable, proposes to execute his bloody commission. Walter insinuates to the ruffian that (unconscious as the brute appears) he has too much tenderness, too much goodness of heart, to perpetrate the proposed crime; and at length, in a faltering voice, breaks to him the proposal that they should save the poor innocents. The ruffian is inexorable, and not to be cajoled into humanity; when poor Walter, driven to his last resource, declares that, before Oliver shall harm the children, he has to destroy him. They fight: in the contest Walter's sword falls from his hand, but is picked up and restored by the boy; and, at last, he kills his savage antagonist. This interesting scene was played by Bannister with accurate truth and nature, and with exquisite touches of real genius. His courage, which had never before been called into exercise,

dawned and rose to its full splendour, under the sense that by no other means could a horrible crime be prevented, and his own benevolent purpose carried into effect. His merciful persuasions had been urged even after the hope of success had disappeared; and every speech, and every aside, denoted the sinking of his heart, until desperation urged the brave resolve on which three lives were to depend. After his victory, the gratitude of his little *protegés*, his exultation in their safety, and his satisfaction in their caresses, seem only to bring forth an appalled sensation of the nature of his deed, denoted in the humorous expression, "I did not think I had so much pluck in me!"

To secure a retreat and a concealment for the children, Walter is obliged to penetrate further into the forest; and leaves them, with a strict charge to remain until his return. Some delay takes place; and the babes, having wandered until exhausted by fatigue, lie on a bank and fall asleep. At this period, their parents, who have been long absent from the country, and whose death has been falsely reported, are benighted in the same forest, reach the spot where their offspring are sleeping, recognize and carry them away in their arms.

Walter returns, and not finding the little ones, as he expected, endeavours to persuade himself that they are hiding to frighten him; he calls; his agi-

tation increases; he tries the playful art of pretending that he sees them, and they may as well come out; his terror grows to agony; his voice alters at every word; and, driven by despair almost to insanity, he rushes out, screaming through the torture of his sensations.

His fever of the mind having now subsided into "grim-visaged, comfortless despair," he is seen at the cottage of his mother, who has prepared a supper for him and Josephine. His sullen abstraction first alarms the old woman; but, when his mistress arrives,—and even her blandishments cannot remove his torpor,—they both express apprehensions in a manner most calculated to increase the uneasiness of his mind. Death and danger are their theme, and most *mal à-propos*, Josephine, to cheer him, begins a song about a murder and a ghost. His agony is at the height, and displayed by incoherent expressions and stifled groans, when, suited exactly to the words of Josephine's song, a violent knocking shakes the cottage. The door opens, and the parents enter, bearing with them the children,—the cause of all Walter's distress. His wild scream of joy,—his affectionate caressing of the little ones,—his revulsion from extreme despair to an agony of delight, formed a most exquisite dramatic spectacle. His recal to the plain feelings of common sense was not less admirable, when the boy, having declared that

he was very hungry, Walter seized the chicken on the table, and, with clumsy eagerness, mauled rather than carved it into pieces for the supper of his famished darlings.

By this time the execrable design of Sir Rowland has transpired; and, as neither the children nor Walter are found, it is concluded that he has killed them. There is a tutor in the family, named Apathy, a part admirably played by Suett, whose only principle is to make the best of everything as it passes, and particularly to omit no opportunity of satisfying his hunger and thirst. In search of Walter, he comes to the cottage; and his tale, his clamour, and his reproaches are at once silenced by the production of the children and the grateful expressions of their father and mother. True to his principle, Apathy draws near to the table, and endeavours to appropriate a portion of the fowl; but Walter, in a transport exquisitely ludicrous, aiming against his breast a wooden spoon, as if it had been a sword, drives him from his purpose.

It is unnecessary further to pursue the narrative; but, in playing Walter, Bannister displayed to the highest advantage, and in the utmost perfection, all that he had derived from the instruction of Garrick, from his own study in tragedy, and his experience in comic acting. Tears and sobs in some passages, heart-easing laughter in others, a

hearty applause in all, and the warm eulogy of every critic, formed his well-merited reward. No performer on the stage ever carried representation to a higher pitch of perfection; it was in all points, from the comic ballad to the utmost excess of impetuous feeling, true, impressive, and faultless.

In this, to him, fortunate season, Bannister played several other characters which greatly augmented his reputation. Colonel Feignwell, in "A Bold Stroke for a Wife," was thoroughly adapted to his powers; and from his first appearance in it (29th October), to the period of his quitting the stage, in London and in the country Feignwell was a part in which he was always anxiously expected and favourably received. Whether Mrs. Centlivre has or has not restrained her versatile hero within even those extended bounds of probability which the comic drama requires, it is not intended here to discuss; but great must be the power, and sound the judgment of the performer, who in one comedy can exhibit five characters, and be in all faultless, in some exquisite: characters, too, so diverse as a high-finished empty beau; a juggling, philosophical antiquary; a Dutch merchant; a superannuated and affectionate steward; and a sturdy Quaker. The part was never better filled or more warmly applauded.

With success, although not with equal renown to

that which he acquired in Walter and Feignwell, Bannister performed (5th October) Marplot, in "The Busy Body;" Lissardo (24th October), in "The Wonder;" Captain Brazen (6th November), in "The Recruiting Officer;" and (10th December) Gregory, in "The Mock Doctor." Brazen is one of Farquhar's happiest portraitures; a frivolous, light, gay, thoughtless fellow, who, thinking himself fit for everything, accomplishes nothing, and by his presumption and his blunders keeps himself always ridiculous, but has no vices or bad qualities to render him odious. He is in forcible contrast with Captain Plume; an animated, high-spirited young officer, a votary of pleasure, keen in the pursuit of an amour, but active and assiduous in his business, from which he cannot be diverted either by interest or pleasure. Notwithstanding the skilful manner in which these characters are depicted,—notwithstanding, also, the numerous merits of Serjeant Kite, there is a coarseness in the plot and conduct of this play which modern refinement will never tolerate sufficiently to permit its frequent representation.

A new piece, in which Bannister and Signora Storace shone with great lustre, was presented to that lady for her benefit (16th December), by Prince Hoare. It was denominated "My Grandmother." Bannister represented Vapour; a young, hypochondriacal *malade imaginaire*, who, bursting from his

supposed sick-chamber, had visited a masquerade, and there fallen in love with a portrait, which by its costume must have been that of a contemporary of his grandmother, and, as he says in a song, "lost ev'ry tooth in her head, before I had cut one in mine." If, in this particular, Hoare was indebted to the Persian Tales for the idea of a man in love with a portrait of Bedi al Jemaul, a mistress of King Solomon, he was not less so to the Arabian Nights, which, in the loquacious, facetious, meddling barber of Bagdad, furnished him with the outline of Dicky Gossip, one of the most entertaining shavers ever produced on the boards, and most delightfully played by Suett. To conclude the piece happily, or otherwise, as the guardian angels who watch over matrimonial felicity may decree, Florella, who in reality had made the impression at the masquerade, retains her dress, and, removing the picture from which she had studied it, sits within the frame: when Vapour approaches, she descends; and he finds that she is real, warm flesh and blood,—in a word, Storace. All illusions vanish with this discovery, and the hypochondriacal bachelor settles down into a contented married man.

Among the whims of the season was Waldron's comedy, "Heigho for a Husband," an imitation of "The Beau's Stratagem" (14th January). It had been, once before, played for the benefit of

the author; and Mrs. Harlowe, a sprightly, clever actress, to whom he was much attached, acted Dorothy, intended as a counterpart to Scrub. Bannister was Frank Millelack, and Mrs. Gibbs, Maria; each a sort of substitute for Mrs. Sullen and Archer, only their love is untainted with any impropriety. In the writing of this play, Waldron showed much smartness and some wit: it was not badly received, and had a moderate success; but, while the Muse of Farquhar walked the stage, her agile movement and skilful grace could not be superseded by such an imitation; the inevitable recollection of the original was fatal to the copy. Yet Waldron had long cherished the idea of this imitation; and I have heard him express the surprise and disappointment he felt, when he found that "The Belle's Stratagem" was written without the least reference to his favourite notion.

In "The Purse; or, The Benevolent Tar," (8th February,) a farce by Mr. Cross, Bannister had the part of Will Steady; and gave in its most advantageous display, so far as depended on him, the blunt humour, the feeling heart, and the pure generosity of sentiment, generally ascribed to the British sailor. That the plot was somewhat absurd, could not be his fault; and, as the piece was comprised in one act, tediousness could not be numbered among its demerits. As the country had just

been dragged into war by France, it was of some importance to enhance the merits, and endear the character, of those who were to be the guardians of her safety, and the promoters of her glory. In this Bannister succeeded to the utmost.

Mr. Cumberland supplied (22nd February) a comedy, "The Box-lobby Challenge." Bannister's character, Jack Crotchet, was of a variegated description. The son of a printer, infesting the avenues to the politest portion of the theatre, kicked, and giving,—by mistake, no doubt,—another man's card instead of his own, presents himself to the audience under disadvantageous auspices; but the candour of his explanation, and his readiness to assist the gentleman he has offended, reconcile us to him, and the spirit and whim which he infused into a part much in need of such an addition, made the play go off tolerably well. Cumberland could never be altogether bad, nor in any way contemptible. This comedy was performed twelve nights, and then heard of no more.

It remains only to mention one more piece in which Bannister performed in this memorable season. A play, by Molloy, named "The Coquette," which was produced in the early part of the century at Lincoln's Inn Fields, was now (23rd November) reproduced under the title of "Wives in Plenty; or, The more, the merrier." Although supported by

Bannister, Parsons, and Suett, Signora Storace, Mrs. Goodall, Mrs. Gibbs, and Mrs. Hopkins, it could not be fostered into permanent life: it was acted three or four times, and never printed. I can just remember that Bannister played a gallant who is ready to marry anybody, and that he sung to himself a consolatory ditty, in which were the lines:

"Take courage, my wives: if I 'm hang'd 'cause I'm blest in ye,
Marrying and hanging, you know, go by destiny."

This extra-season is particularly memorable in the life of Bannister for having supplied him with one character, Walter, which I do not hesitate to term his greatest; another, Feignwell, which was a permanent addition to his fame, and in which he was always well received by the public; and some more, such as Vapour and Will Steady, of sufficient interest to make good his hold on general favour, and to consolidate his popularity. Yet the termination of the season was anxiously, not to say impatiently, looked for. Expectation was raised to its highest pitch by the reported perfections of the new theatre, the erection of which was making rapid progress under the direction of Mr. Holland.

There was, beside, a chilling and uncomfortable effect produced in the public mind by a horrible catastrophe which occurred at the little theatre on the 3rd of February. Their Majesties had com-

manded the performance; and, by an accident, almost if not altogether unparalleled, three pieces were selected, "My Grandmother," "No Song, no Supper," and "The Prize,"—all from the pen of one author, Prince Hoare.

Loyalty had, at this time, more the appearance of a passion,—an affectionate impulse, and not a mere duty,—than at any preceding period within the memory of man. The undisguised aims of sedition to spread republican principles, aided as they were by the example and encouragement of France, produced in a generous and high-minded people a corresponding demonstration in favour of a King whose virtues endeared him to all hearts, and gave an ardent impulse to all demonstrations of duty and respect. A prodigious crowd assembled at the doors of the theatre. The entrance to the pit, at that time, was by a narrow and steep, though short flight of stone steps, never safe to descend, but by the pressure of a great and eager crowd made fatally insecure. In the struggle for admission, some fell, others were thrown down by stumbling over them; a crush and tumult of indescribable horror ensued, in which, and by its immediate consequences, fifteen lives were lost, and many serious injuries sustained.

By judicious precautions, the dismal intelligence was prevented from being communicated in the

King's box until the entertainments were finished. When the calamity was disclosed, the royal family expressed the truest sympathy with the sufferers, directed inquiries to be made into their circumstances, and did all that genuine benevolence could effect toward the solace of their woes. But the accident left on the public mind an impression, deep, strong, and not easily or speedily to be removed.

CHAPTER XVI.

1794 — 1795.

The New Theatre in Drury Lane—opened with an Oratorio.—Some observations on the building.—The increased size and financial system of the theatres.—Strictures on Holland's architecture.—Macbeth, the first play performed,—great strength of the cast. Mr. Charles Kemble's first appearance.—Absence of Banquo's Ghost.—Introduction of Black Spirits and White.—Prologue by General Fitzpatrick—spoken by Kemble.—Epilogue by George Colman—delivered by Miss Farren.—The Jew, by Mr. Cumberland.—Bannister in Sheva,—Squire Groom.—The Glorious First of June.—Bannister at Liverpool.—Haymarket.—Death of the elder Colman.—Bannister plays Richard the Third.—The Apparition, by Cross,—Bannister in Chearley.—Drury Lane.—Mrs. Robinson.—Her farce of Nobody—unsuccessful.—Revival of All's Well that Ends Well,—Bannister in the Clown.—Cobb's Cherokee,—Bannister plays Jack Average.—His Benefit,—Child of Nature—Agreeable Surprise;—he plays Lingo,—Mrs. Jordan Cowslip.—He plays, for her benefit, Darby in The Poor Soldier,—Mr. Classic in Jerningham's Welsh Heiress.—Michael, in The Adopted Child.—Jack of Newbury, by Mr. Hook.—Cumberland's First Love,—Bannister in Jack Mowbray.—His Benefit,—Isaac, in The Duenna,—Hob in the Well.—Death of Baddeley and Parsons.—New Hay at the Old Market.—Just eulogy on Parsons.—Morton's Zorinski.—Bannister plays Shylock,—the three Singles, in the Three and the Deuce.

At length the time so ardently desired arrived. The new theatre in Drury Lane was thrown open to the public on the 12th of March 1794.

An oratorio, commencing with the Coronation anthem of Handel, was the first performance; and, by the erection of a magnificent Gothic chapel for the music, the effect of the whole building was greatly enhanced. An opportunity was thus acquired of showing to great advantage the effect of music, both vocal and instrumental, and the scientific construction of the house for the transmission of sound.

On entering, every beholder was struck with the appearance of cheerfulness and lightness produced by the structure of the audience part; by the happy mixture of colour and of gold; by the slightness, yet sufficiency in strength, of the metallic pilasters which supported the boxes; and by that general fitness, propriety, and cheerfulness which constitute beauty in such a building, although they cannot be analyzed or divided into parts. Censuring critics compared the house to a bird-cage, but in so doing they unconsciously pronounced its eulogy; for nothing can more delightfully represent to the mind the idea of a place where the pleasures of hearing and of vision are to be sought,—where all are desirous to see and to be seen,—than those elegant abodes which art and judgment have contrived for the free wanderers of the air to display their beauties of form and colour, and to forget, or not to desire, the enlarged state of unlimited freedom.

Still, for the enjoyment of the spectators, this

elegant theatre was much too large; but, from the state of the times, that fault was inevitable. Anticipating the enlargement of Drury Lane, Mr. Harris, without the boast of any architectural beauty, had greatly increased the size of Covent Garden theatre; and the two houses rivalled each other, more in the power to receive large audiences, than in the ability to instruct, to improve, or permanently to please them. A theatre was now become a sort of political, financial association. Large debts were contracted, secured by renters' shares, with nightly payments and free admissions: the practice soon arose of engaging greater companies in every department of the drama than could possibly be brought into action in any one night of performance; and often players, who were not wanted, were retained, that they might not increase the strength of the rival establishment. All this had more the air of pushing a trade than promoting a liberal art, and the high estimation of theatres diminished in consequence.

But if the structure of the new theatre was generally admired for its effect on the eye, observers were not wanting to censure, in severe terms, defects in the formation, which, although not equally obvious with its general beauties, were not therefore the less palpable when pointed out. A learned Orientalist, who published four books of imitations

of Martial, severely applicable to facts and individuals of the day, gave one on the theatre, which was acknowledged to be written, if not without malice, at least with wit and judgment. It is from "*Non silice duro, structilive cemento.*"

"Not like Black-friars' Bridge,—frail, crumbling stone;
Nor plaster, like the mansion of Calonne;*
Did Holland choose (of brain perversely thick)
For Drury's walls: but deal, encased with brick.
Ah! who shall count what slaughtered forests fell
For this huge rat-trap in a brick-work shell?
So Britain boasts her wooden walls at sea;
So fir-fram'd dykes keep Holland water-free.
Here, too, we view, where props of timber groan
Beneath the cumb'rous front of useless stone;
While rock-hewn shafts in vain parade deride
The flimsy patch-work tott'ring at their side.
Our builder's genius needs no farther proof
Save lath foundations and a leaden roof."

When Lent was over, the theatre opened (21st April) with Macbeth. As the house was, with some ostentatious profession, dedicated to Shakspeare, it is suggested by an ingenious and able critic that a delay of two days would have conferred the grace of opening it on the poet's birth-day: it may be added that it is also the festival of Saint George, the patron of Old England; but, as Mr. Boaden observes, the 23rd was on Wednesday, and Saint Monday (a patron, I suppose, much preferable to

* Near Hyde-park Corner.

Saint George,) carried it with the treasury. In the opening performance all the strength that could be exhibited in one piece was combined. Kemble and Mrs. Siddons were the Thane and his wicked wife; and every line, every word they uttered, every look, every action, every gesticulation, however minute, by them, formed a study, not for actors alone, but for painters, poets, and, of the higher class, orators. Palmer, Wroughton, and Bensley were Macduff, Banquo, and Duncan. Charles Bannister, unrivalled in singing the sort of music which appertains to the part, was Hecate. To give a grace to the performance, and render the night long memorable, Mr. Charles Kemble made his first appearance in London in Malcolm: the character is of small importance, but it was judiciously chosen for a very young actor. A performer so circumstanced should not rush at once to the highest pinnacle of his profession, to be disgraced, and perhaps ruined, by a fall; but should, as he has time enough before him, cautiously and laboriously work his way, until he finds himself, by persevering effort, placed so advantageously that he cannot be removed. Such was the course which Kemble marked out for his esteemed brother; and most carefully and successfully was it pursued.

A fanciful innovation marked this performance,—Banquo's ghost did not appear at the banquet; the

audience were to suppose that Macbeth fancied he saw it: the idea was not absolutely new, but common sense had pronounced against it. The question of propriety in a matter of this kind cannot be decided by short axioms or general observations. There are many circumstances in tragedy which it would be absolutely ridiculous to represent. The great phenomena of nature compressed into a painted scene, must ever appear burlesque. Who could endure, if "Œdipus" were represented, to see a comet shoot along the sky? Nor can the directions of authors always be relied on. When Mr. Bayes is told that his eclipse may be supposed; "Supposed, sir!" he exclaims; "egad! you may as well suppose my whole play." But Mr. Bayes's notions will not govern the taste of a modern audience. In the wonderfully impressive scene which terminates "Venice preserved," Otway directs that in a few minutes after Jaffier's death his ghost shall appear; and then, almost immediately, that his ghost and that of Pierre shall show themselves to Belvidera, both bloody. It is evident that there is something in this too like pantomime to be endured. The majestic madness of Belvidera needs no such aid, and her soul-harrowing death would lose all its effect if the scene were so encumbered.

But, with respect to Macbeth, the case is widely different. In the midst of a banquet, for him to

become melancholy-mad, and rave at an empty chair, is to the serious hardly intelligible, to the lively perfectly ludicrous. The terror of the incident, as imagined by Shakspeare, depends upon the circumstance that a form, presenting itself visibly to Macbeth, is at the same time unseen by the other persons on the stage. Now, if the audience see that Macbeth sees the ghost, the fact, that the guests do not see it, is an obvious and strong source of dramatic terror: but, if the spectators are not apprised by their senses that he sees Banquo, they cannot forbear sympathizing with the guests in thinking that he is possessed by a strange infirmity, —awful, perhaps, if the actor can make it so, but not inspiring that kind of awe which belongs to a supernatural interposition. Besides, the personal interference of Banquo in this scene forms an essential part of his history as a character in this play; his figure, after death, confronting Macbeth at the height of his ill-acquired grandeur, forms a fine sequel to the relation which he has borne to the usurper during his life. His agency in the drama is finely wound up when the "lesser than Macbeth, and greater," seats himself in the chair of state at the royal feast, visibly to Macbeth and to the audience, and breaks up the banquet "with most admired disorder." Many persons, however, think and reason otherwise; and I beg to be un-

derstood, not as affecting to give a decision, but only as offering an opinion.

Perhaps it was to compensate the non-appearance of Banquo's ghost, that, in the cavern scene, a set of little beings, never before exhibited, hopped round the cauldron in different-coloured smock-frocks, representing the "black spirits and white, red spirits and grey," who are evoked by the witches to mingle in their unhallowed orgies.

To introduce the town to the new edifice, a prologue written by General Fitzpatrick, not, as was expected, by Mr. Sheridan, was spoken by Kemble. In fifty well-tuned, but not very vigorous lines, it presented little or nothing beyond the reach of trivial common-place. After saying something about the state of the world, ravaged Europe, and the asylum found by freedom under the safeguard of law and order here,—after craving a little licence to the generous ardour of Congreve, Wycherley and Vanburgh,—it proceeds,

"Nor for an ill-tim'd ribald jest refuse
A tear to Otway's or to Southerne's muse:
But chief, with reverence, watch his hallow'd lays
To whom this night a monument we raise!
Beyond what sculptur'd marble can bestow,—
The silent tribute of surviving woe!
Beyond the powers of undecaying brass,
Or the proud pyramid's unmeaning mass,—
A shrine more worthy of his fame we give,
Where, unimpair'd, his genius still may live;—

Where, though his fire the Critic's rules transgress,
The glowing bosom shall his cause confess;
Where Britain's sons, thro' each succeeding age,
Shall hail the founder of our English stage,
And from the cavils of pedantic spleen
Defend the glories of their Shakspeare's scene."

George Colman supplied an epilogue of much greater length, and much better written; in delivering which Miss Farren assumed the character of a housekeeper to some titled virtuoso,

* * * * * "who
Permits the envious crowd his house to view;
When pictures, busts, and bronzes to display,
He treats the public with a public day;
That all the world may in their minds retain them,
He bids his dawdling housekeeper explain them."

Proceeding in her detail, the lively ('lovely' would not be an error of the press,) housekeeper, as if anticipating the epigram already quoted, says,

"Our pile is rock, more durable than brass,
Our decorations gossamer and gas;
Weighty, yet airy in effect; our plan
Solid,—tho' light,—like a vain Alderman.
Blow wind,—come wreck,— in ages yet unborn,
Our castle's strength shall laugh a siege to scorn!
The very ravages of fire we scout,
For we have wherewithal to put it out:
In ample reservoirs our firm reliance,
Whose streams set conflagration at defiance.
Panic alone avoid,—let none begin it:
Should the flame spread, sit still,—there 's nothing in it;—
We 'll undertake to drown you all in half a minute!"

The scene shortly afterward exhibited a tank of water. The actress then caused the display of an iron curtain, which, whatever might happen,—even should water fail to quench flame,—

> " The hottest fire shan't singe a single feather:
> No! I assure our generous benefactors,
> 'Twould only burn the scenery and the actors."

In conclusion, the scene arose, and exhibited the statue of Shakspeare.

But how vain the hopes, how futile the prophecies of man! This perennial, fire-proof, indestructible edifice, spite of precaution and prediction, never completed its fifteenth year: it fell a victim to the element which, in the poet's address, it was supposed to brave.

To come now to that portion of the performances in which Bannister took a share. Very soon after the commencement of the regular season (8th May), Mr. Cumberland's comedy, " The Jew," was produced. From the days of Marlow and Shakspeare to those of Sheridan, the Jews had been so constantly held up, in dramatic works, to detestation or derision, that a mere inspector of the bills, when first this piece was announced, would prepare himself for a pang of detestation, or a hearty effusion of laughter, and little more. They who were better acquainted with the principles, the feelings, and the writings of Cumberland, might form a different, although in-

distinct anticipation. In the "Observer," beside the history of Nicholas Pedrosa, a merry, benevolent barber-surgeon of the lineage of Abraham, who had nearly fallen a victim to the Inquisition, he had devoted two very well written papers, Nos. 38 and 39, to a consideration of the case of these unhappy people, blended with strong remarks on the misrepresentation of them on the stage, and the insolent cruelty which they had to encounter whenever they appeared in public.

In his comedy he worked out the same theme. His hero, Sheva, is a thorough Duke's-place Jew in his dialect, his manners, and his pursuits. He is a broker, immensely rich, without a child or relative; but eager to accumulate unneeded wealth: his parsimony exceeds all imaginable extremes. In a house almost without furniture, in a garb which he fears will fall to pieces if touched, he denies himself and those about him, not the comforts alone, but the mere necessaries of life. When hunger, thirst, and feebleness beset him, he inquires if his servants have not left in the shell a small portion of the single egg, or anything beside the skin of a potato which he has allowed as a meal for two; and, when no such luxury is supplied, solaces himself with a glass of water, because it is good, and costs nothing.

From this picture we might soon turn, as from

a disgusting caricature, but the author has found ample means to redeem him. In his Duke's-place jargon he utters sentences which often sparkle with wit, and repels insolence in terms of manly dignity, not unmixed with exquisite sarcasm. His temper, although sometimes marked with a little peevishness and irritability, is such, that his starved servants will not quit him; and his grumbling, emaciated foot-boy declares that, although starved in his service, he will fight and die in his defence.

But his more exalted virtue is displayed in a sense of gratitude which, fixed deeply in his heart, influences his wishes and his hopes, and finally determines his conduct; and a dignified benevolence which prompts him to part with hundreds and thousands as mere gifts, while "his prevailing love of pelf" wrings from him the exclamation, "Bowels, you must pinch for this!" In the end, he gives wealth and happiness to the widow and son of one who, at a former period, has rescued him from a death of torture and ignominy.

This was the character intrusted to the skill and genius of Bannister; and never was the confidence of an author more amply repaid, or his hopes more abundantly gratified, or even exceeded. In every passage the feelings of the audience were at his entire command. They tranquilly approved, they laughed, they wept, they yielded to every emotion

which the actor sought to impart; and their applause, like their sensibility and their delight, was unbounded. Bannister never was greater or more successful.

In Sheva the whole interest of the play resides. His humorous, grumbling, half-starved servant Jabal, admirably portrayed by Suett, lends considerable aid in the display of his disposition; but the other personages, although exquisitely performed, particularly that by Miss Farren, do little beyond affording scope to the distinguished Sheva. There is a Sir Stephen Bertram, an English merchant, who, if the Israelitish gibberish had been put into his mouth, would have satisfied all old prejudices as an admirable Jew. He is proud, hard-hearted, selfish, vindictive, unrelenting, until near the close of the piece, when, as if by magic, at the sight of his son's wife, whom he had hated without seeing, all his prejudices and bad passions clear off like the morning's mist before the bright sun, and show him all light, where before he had appeared all gloom and shadow. This is very theatrical, but not at all natural.

It was said, unfortunately it was not true, that the Jews had shown their gratitude to Mr. Cumberland by a munificent donation. The poet, although such a memorial would have been highly acceptable, was doomed to know that the favour which is con-

ferred by words is deemed to be repaid by approbation. But, in fact, the cause of the Jews, if not before espoused on the stage, had not wanted some liberal advocates: among the most distinguished, we may recollect the benevolent Israelite in Smollett's Count Fathom, a man who, exempt himself from vice, meanness, or peculiarity, not only performs distinguished acts of charity and benevolence, but by the force of his reprimand, and the vigour of his reasoning, restrains, and finally subdues pride, prejudice, and vindictiveness in another.

Most unadvisedly, the manager brought out (23rd May) Macklin's "Love à-la-mode." Bannister played Squire Groom: to say nothing of his qualifications for this hair-brained eccentric, it could not be expected that in seeing him, R. Palmer, and Suett, the public would forget how the sporting squire, Sir Callaghan O'Brallachan, and Beau Mordecai were being performed by Lewis, Johnstone, and Quick.

A renowned and most important victory, the precursor of unexampled naval triumphs, had been achieved over the French fleet by Earl Howe. The widows and relatives of the brave who fell were justly deemed the children of the nation; and, in aid of the fund raised by subscription for them, a free benefit was given at Drury Lane, (2nd July,) and a piece was produced, named, in honour of the day of victory, "The Glorious First of June." It was so

hastily prepared, that a portion of it had been performed whilst another was not yet written. Cobb was the ostensible author, but Mr. Sheridan lent some aid to the dialogue; the Duke of Leeds, Lord Mulgrave, and some others contributed songs; and Mr. Richardson a prologue, which was delivered by Kemble. Among other circumstances attending its hasty preparation, Kelly gives an anecdote highly characteristic. Having to prepare the music, and to sing in the piece, he requested Mr. Sheridan to give him the smallest portion of dialogue possible. Accordingly his part consisted of this single sentence, "There is Louisa's cottage; she is in it—or she is not." A song began immediately, and Kelly was not called upon to speak any more; but the manager, with characteristic waggery, congratulated him on his quickness in study, and the correctness of his memory. The piece, except in its temporary application, possessed no great strength; it was a sort of sequel to "No Song, no Supper;" and Bannister sustained his old part of Robin, with no alteration in his character, nor anything striking in situation or incident: it ended with a sea-fight and a *fête*.

In the following summer, Bannister performed at Liverpool. Prince Hoare wrote for his introduction a prologue, in which the principal characters he had played in London were enumerated; and his ability to fill them was duly appreciated by the audience:

the expedition was both honourable and profitable.

In the course of the Haymarket season, the elder Colman died; an event which made no great difference in the concerns or conduct of the theatre. Illness both of body and mind had, for several years, compelled him to retire; and the labours of management devolved on his son, who was not wanting in genius, judgment, or spirit, ably to fulfil them. His loss left on the public mind only that regret which must ever be felt at the disappearance from among us of one of those lights of literature and talent on which we have long fixed our eyes with admiration and with pleasure.

Bannister's absence afforded an opportunity to Mr. Fawcett, a rising young actor in low-comedy, to show himself advantageously in some characters which otherwise he could not have claimed.

At a late period Bannister made his appearance on his accustomed boards. He played (27th August), for his father's benefit, the arduous character of Richard the Third. I find no trace of the merits of this performance, but we know that it was not repeated.

In this short season, he had for his benefit (5th September) "The Jew," in which he performed his admired part of Sheva; and a new farce, by Cross, called "The Apparition," which soon accommodated

itself to the known rule in logic "*De non apparentibus*," &c. The author published it, with a dedication to Bannister, acknowledging his friendly assistance in introducing it to the public. His part, Chearly, was one of the least interesting and most foolishly depicted sailors ever put on the stage. Vapid sentiments expressed in coarse language, extravagant generosity, inconsiderate bravery, and boisterous love, with a copious mixture of nonsense and unnecessary swearing, make up the whole of this vulgar, common-place caricature.

At Drury Lane Bannister mustered, as usual, with the earliest of the corps. Mrs. Robinson, once celebrated under the name of Perdita, supplied the first new piece in which he appeared: it was a farce called "Nobody." The life of Mrs. Robinson had been for many years one of much suffering, corporeal and mental. She was a martyr to the rheumatism, which oppressed her with perpetual anguish; yet her spirits never flagged, her politeness never failed. Although she had lived many years apart from her husband, still, as she cherished and loved her daughter, she could not, without feeling, be apprised of the disgraces and distresses to which a man was exposed who sought a precarious and disgraceful subsistence among the lowest frequenters of the gaming-table, and was himself the master of one of those beggarly and miserable receptacles called "Hells."

Endowed with genius and talents, and mistress of several languages, she aspired to the honours of literature; but unfortunately associated herself with that knot of affected, empty, gaudy manufacturers of rhymes who fell so justly under the heavy lash of William Gifford in the Baviad. Her infirmity in health and in poetry were described in two bitter lines:

> "See Robinson forget her state, and move
> On crutches tow'rd the grave, to *Light o' love.*"

"Light o' love," he says in a note from Shakspeare, "that is, a song that goes without a burden." In other notes he was unsparingly severe on poor Perdita.

Her spirits were not broken down by calamity or by hostility; she still spent much of her time in literary society and in pursuits of literature, and at this period ventured on a dramatic essay, presenting herself point-blank to the aim of her adversaries. As if to place herself out of the hope of escape from malice, the aim of her farce was to ridicule a party very obnoxious to serious censure, as well as lively sarcasm,—the female gamblers, or, as they were called, "the lady Greeks;" that is to say, certain ladies of rank who kept their houses open to evening parties, at which some eminent speculators in ruin produced a bank for the game of Faro, in the profits of which those ladies were said to share,

if no further, certainly to the extent of paying all expenses. From this host, Mrs. Robinson says that she had undisguised threats that her farce should be damned; and she says that, before it began, the disposition was fully shown by individuals in the galleries, and even by ladies in the boxes. Bannister and Mrs. Jordan exerted themselves to the utmost to procure a fair hearing; the public so far coincided with them: but, against a firm and determined opposing phalanx, no theatrical force could maintain a contest, and after the third stormy night "Nobody" was withdrawn.

As a specimen of Bannister's good-nature, and his readiness to promote, by any apparent sacrifice of his own feelings, the general interest of the theatre, it may be mentioned that, on Kemble's reviving "All's well that ends well," (12th December,) he not only resigned the character of Parolles, in which he had been eminently successful, to King, but performed the Clown,—the least interesting or entertaining of all the personages of that description which Shakspeare has placed on the stage. Reasons have already been offered for doubting that this comedy can ever be a permanent favourite, and the event upon this occasion did not tend to dispel such doubts.

Cobb's opera, called "The Cherokee," (20th December,) gave Bannister a new character, Jack

Average; a whimsical youth, who hates his cousin, a young lady with an exactly similar temper, merely because her father desires their union; but, when the old man insists on their renouncing each other, they discover that they are violently in love, and marry in spite of him. Jack is a comical compound of camp and counting-house, a sort of city stray who has lost himself by rambling between 'Change Alley and the Horse Guards; his habits are mercantile, while his ambition is military, and his dialect is a medley of both: but this humour, not over new, is easily exhausted, and, as Jack has little to do, he is soon a load upon the scene. As much as could be achieved for these whimsical, but not ingenious persons, was accomplished by Bannister and Storace; but neither their vivacity, nor the solemnity of an American-Indian plot, nor some excellent music by Stephen Storace, could remove the weight of dulness which oppressed the performance, and made it completely unsuccessful, although it dragged on for some time a lingering and neglected existence. All the characters are English, or American-Indian; we had not then been taught by Mathews to discern and appreciate the humour of our brother Jonathan. Eight years afterward (1802), an unsuccessful attempt was made to revive this opera, under the name of "Algonah."

For his benefit (16th April, 1795), Bannister per-

formed Count Valencia, in " The Child of Nature ;" a minor comedy, translated from the French of Madame de Genlis, by Mrs. Inchbald, and usually performed at Covent Garden. He also took Edwin's character of Lingo, in " The Agreeable Surprise," in which he perfectly succeeded, and which he long retained. Colman kindly lent him the piece, and Mrs. Jordan with equally characteristic kindness played the part of Cowslip. He added his own immortal Walter, in " The Children of the Wood.' In return for Mrs. Jordan's friendship he played for her benefit (14th May), Darby, in " The Poor Soldier :" the part was not suited to his powers, nor did he endeavour to make it his own by repetition ; the less, perhaps, as the farce belonged to Covent Garden, and Darby, originally played by Edwin, had been successfully studied by Munden. Mrs. Jordan's Patrick had long been celebrated in country theatres, and was highly appreciated in town.

In " The Welsh Heiress," an unsuccessful comedy by Mr. Jerningham, he had the part of Classical Frenzy ; a poet who is very conceited about his productions, which are uniformly bad, and who is a constant butt to society, without a sufficient portion of whim or fun to raise a hearty laugh, even at his own expense.

The public dismissed this unfortunate offspring of a gentleman, a scholar, and a poet ; it had a

fretful existence of one night only (17th April). But, however deficient in merit this comedy might appear on the stage, in the closet it had enough to produce a commendatory epigram from the veteran Lord Orford; and, as the author was encouraged to print it, the public favoured it to the extent of at least three editions.

Far different was the success of Deputy Birch's "Adopted Child," given by him to Master Walsh for his benefit. In this after-piece Bannister played (1st May) Michael, a blunt, hearty, good-humoured ferryman. He was the guardian and adoptive father of an infant who had been left in his charge with a mysterious trunk, which was not to be opened until after the death of Sir Edmond, of Milford Castle. Michael discovers that his adopted child is heir to the domains of Milford, averts a plot for carrying him off, and by his exertions causes his title to be recognised. Michael's humour and feeling were, as usual, well supported and relieved by his wife, Nell, personated by Mrs. Bland.

In an unlucky hour it occurred to Mr. Hook, eldest son of Mr. James Hook, the composer, that he would write an opera. He chose for his subject "Jack of Newbury." Bannister played in it; and Signora Storace, Mrs. Crouch, and Mrs. Bland lent their aid; there was also a masque introduced, in honour of the Prince of Wales's mar-

riage: but all would not do; poor Jack was kept in a state of precarious existence for a few nights, and then disappeared for ever. The author, a man of learning and ability, afterward took orders, and rose to dignity in the church: his brother, Theodore, cultivated, I need not say how advantageously, the field which had been to him so sterile; and made also a very conspicuous figure in various other departments of literature, particularly (not to mention politics) in romance and historical biography.

Cumberland's "First Love," played this season (12th May), is pronounced by the fair editor of "The British Theatre" to be inferior to every one of the numerous comedies of its author. Without weighing this observation in too exact a balance, it may readily be affirmed that in substance it is correct. "First Love" has neither plot, incident, nor wit to recommend it; yet, supported by the great talent of Miss Farren and Mrs. Jordan, it enjoyed a temporary reputation. Bannister had the part of Jack Mowbray, a naval officer; but, for all he does, he might as well have been a country squire, a physician, or a lawyer. He is mere ballast in the dramatic boat, to keep her steady when the violence of others would have made her show her keel, if it had not capsized her.

For benefits, Bannister performed several characters, which are not worth recording. Among

them were Isaac, in "The Duenna," not a little opposed to Sheva, in which he shone so brilliantly; and Hob, in "Hob in the Well," a farce which, although popular in a preceding generation, could now hardly be endured.

In the course of the season, the stock of entertainment derived from low-comedy was considerably diminished by the death of two highly esteemed performers. Baddeley, who departed on the 20th November, 1794, had been a favourite with the town nearly forty years. He was originally a cook, and Foote is said to have been his master, until genius and ambition forced him from the fire-side to the stage. With this patron it is said that he once had a fierce quarrel, and defied him to mortal combat. "Here is a pretty fellow!" said the wit; "I allowed him to take my spit from the rack and stick it by his side, and now he wants to stick me with it." In Frenchmen, Germans, Swiss, and Jews, Baddeley was unequalled. In Canton, his clumsy flattery and prostrate obsequiousness, although often mixed with a shrewd, sarcastic irony, were so evidently a fit compound for the sickly palate of Lord Ogleby, that one could not help pitying the old peer when, in the absence of his usual parasites, he was obliged to beg a laugh at his joke from Lovewell. In characters unadorned with foreign peculiarity, such as Brainworm, in "Every Man in his Humour,"

Lockit, in "The Beggar's Opera," the Baron, in "The Haunted Tower," and Old Vinegar, in "The Son-in-law," he gained high reputation. To these I should add Grumio, in "Katherine and Petruchio;" in which his performance of the scene where he runs off his humours upon Curtis, while he is *transi de froid*, was inimitable. He bequeathed, as an annual memorial, a cake with wine, to be enjoyed in the green-room on Twelfth-day; and he left an estate to the Theatrical Fund: but I am inclined to think that this latter devise was void in law by the statute of mortmain, and the property, for want of heirs, escheated to the crown.

Parsons was the other performer whose death was alluded to. He had been a player nearly as long as Baddeley; but in a more ample range of characters, and with greater general reputation. In Corbaccio he was perfect, and may safely be termed unrivalled, since he had no competitor, nor has he had a successor. Several other parts are mentioned as being played by him in unequalled perfection; the list comprises Skirmish, Alscrip, Doiley, and several others; to which I should add Sheep-face, in "The Village Lawyer," and Doctor Bartholo, in "The Spanish Barber." He was excellent in every part he performed; I do not think that a conspicuous failure is recorded; he knew exactly the extent of his own powers, and could adapt them, with

never-failing correctness, to the business of the scene. Exhausted by a long-continued asthma, he appeared in Sir Fretful Plagiary on the 29th of January, and expired on the 3rd of February 1795.

To the memory of this excellent performer, a just and well-imagined compliment was paid at the opening of the Haymarket theatre (9th June); Colman wrote a prelude for the occasion, called "New Hay at the Old Market." The audience, being introduced as usual to a knowledge of the supposed distresses of the concern, the following dialogue ensues:

Carpenter.—We want a new scaffold for the Surrender of Calais.

Prompter.—Ah! but where shall we get such another hangman?—Poor fellow! poor Parsons! The old cause of our mirth is now the cause of our melancholy.—He who so often made us forget our cares may well claim a sigh to his memory.

Carpenter.—He was one of the comicallest fellows I ever see!

Prompter.—Ay, and one of the honestest, Master Carpenter. When an individual has combined private worth with public talent, he quits the bustling scene of life with twofold applause, and we doubly deplore his exit.

Bannister had a character in this prelude (that of Sylvester Daggerwood); but, as it was afterwards formed into a separate farce, it will be noticed in a future page. The general aim of the piece was to ridicule the size of the winter playhouses; the introduction of elephants, horses, and bulls upon the stage; and the fustian mock-morality which seeks to ex-

tract interest from persons the very reverse of virtuous, and to excite feelings in their favour.

This season was not one of great vivacity, variety, or novelty. Morton produced, (20th June,) in three acts, a compound of serious, almost tragic drama, mixed with scenes of comedy, or rather farce, under the name of "Zorinski." However open to critical objection, the piece was not without considerable merit. It was well received, and played twenty times. The plot was founded historically on events in the life of Stanislaus, then living, and nominally King of Poland; but that unfortunate sovereign was suffering too much in the grasp of the spoilers of his country to permit his person to be brought on the stage, and therefore his name, and those of the conspirators against him, were changed. With the licence tolerated in modern pieces, an Irishman and a Jew were found in the salt-mines of Dalecarlia. Bannister had the part of Zarno, a faithful servant of Zorinski, who, being anxious to escape from the mine, tells us, in a song, that "salt cures a hog, but kills a man." He is faithful and facetious, but performs no particular action.

As a parting tribute to his early divinity, the Tragic Muse, he performed, for the benefit of Mrs. Gibbs (3rd August), Shylock, of which it is not desirable, and, for his own benefit (18th August), Hamlet, of which it is not necessary, to speak.

Toward the close of the season, (2nd September,) "The Three and the Deuce," a new comedy by Prince Hoare, called forth Bannister's versatile powers. The author has placed in the same inn at Cheltenham three brothers, Pertinax, Peregrine, and Percival Single, not less alike than the Menœchmi of Plautus, or the Antipholises of Shakspeare, but very different in their propensities. Pertinax is studious, grave, sententious; Peregrine volatile, active, enterprising; while poor Percival, a mere idiot, is only permitted to leave home under the protection of an Irish tutor (God save the mark!) named Mac Floggum. Bannister played the three brothers, and preserved, with admirable fidelity, their separate identity. The mistakes and confusion which arise from each being seen separately, and mistaken for one of the others, form an amusing, and sometimes interesting entanglement. Grizzle, a servant of Pertinax, is driven almost beyond his senses at the unexpected sallies of his master; and, at last, Percival is rescued from the stern dominion of Mac Floggum, to undergo a more gentle captivity with Taffline, an interesting little Welsh girl, admirably played by Mrs. Bland. The piece was very favourably received; and Bannister, and, after him, Elliston, acquired great applause in the three Singles.

CHAPTER XVII.

1795—1796.

Charge against Bannister in The True Briton newspaper;—his answer;—reply of the Editor;—observations.—The Dependent.—The Man of Ten Thousand, by Holcroft;—observations on the author and his progress in life;—ill success of his comedy;—some account of its principal incidents.—Bannister in Bowkitt.—The Shepherdess of Cheapside.—The Plain Dealer.—Bannister in Jerry Blackacre.—The Iron Chest,—unsuccessful at Drury Lane;—reproduced with better effect at the Haymarket;—published;—Colman's angry preface.—Vortigern,—its origin—and fate;—controversy concerning it;—Ireland's confession.—Mahmoud, Prince of Persia.—Mr. Braham.—The Smugglers.—Bannister plays Jobson in The Devil to pay.

At an early part of the following Drury Lane season, Bannister found himself, for the only time in his life, under the necessity of explaining to the public a portion of his conduct which had been exposed to wanton and undeserved censure. The state of politics toward the close of 1795 rendered demonstrations of loyalty extremely useful, both as they evinced a right feeling in those who made, and checked the presumption of those who loathed them. The performers were used to sing "God save the King" in the course of every evening on which a

musical piece was performed, and every voice in the theatre was expected to join in the harmony. A very loyal, but not very ably conducted newspaper, called "The True Briton," exhibited a charge against Bannister for having, when that air was sung, held back from joining in it, and having at last, when personally called by the audience, sung reluctantly and feebly. From this malicious and unfounded accusation he discharged himself in a judicious letter to the Editor.

November 4th, 1795.

SIR,

An attack having been made upon me in your paper, and repeated, which I know and feel to be unjust, I expect that equity from you which I am persuaded you are disposed to exercise, and request you to publish this reply. I am accused of having come forward and sung with reluctance when the song of "God save the King" was called for on Saturday last; I will not retort upon my accusers with a charge of malignity; for, I freely acknowledge, the public prints have almost uniformly been favourable to me. Appearances, no doubt, have misled. I was dressed in character to exhibit the ridiculous conceits of the Apothecary in "The Prize." My feelings, at the moment, made me question the propriety of such a personage coming

forward conspicuously to join in music so serious as to have been repeatedly called sacred. I thought it more respectful that a farcical character should keep in the back-ground, and not obtrude upon the public eye. I might have been charged with intending to burlesque that which ought to be solemn. All intentional disrespect, all inclination to announce a political opinion, and all disloyal sentiment, I here, in the face of my country, disclaim.

I am a professional man; my great ambition has been, and is, to exercise that profession so as to deserve public applause and private esteem; and I hope and trust no man will wantonly endeavour to deprive me of either.

I am, sir,

Your humble servant,

JOHN BANNISTER.

This candid explanation would have satisfied any one who desired nothing but justice. The iron fangs of a newspaper accuser are not so easily loosed. The Editor returned to the charge, with a quibbling assertion that his censure was not directed against Mr. Bannister, but a performer who, upon the stage, refused to join in the national and popular air (at least such ought it to be in a theatre royal) of "God save the King." It was admitted that he had made a sufficient apology for keeping back in the

first instance; but he could have none, it was said, for singing so languidly when, in consequence of the urgent and personal call of several gentlemen in the boxes, he did at last join in the song.

Except for its singularity in the life of Bannister, this ill-tempered and feeble attack would not have deserved notice. Even those who were little acquainted with the manly candour of his mind, must have viewed with satisfaction his firm and open explanation, and recoiled with contempt and disgust from that illiberal meanness, which, instead of a frank acknowledgment of mistake or misinformation, resorted to a play on words, affecting to distinguish between *the* performer who had been named, and *a* performer whom nobody could even guess at,—a mere fraudulent generality; in which, at last, unwilling to recede from a wanton and unmerited charge of refusing to sing, the accuser is reduced to a silly exception, that the singing was not sufficiently loud.

This attack was, as to time, the more malignant, because a disloyal faction had just driven "Venice Preserved" from the stage by boisterous applause of every speech; and there were many which could be construed into an invective against the British constitution. As the Editor of "The True Briton" was known to be patronized by some of the most prominent characters in the state, it could not be

expected that, with them, this piece of dastardly malice would do him any good; and, as Bannister founded his claims to respect on a public and private life free from all blemish, it could not, whatever might be intended, do him any harm. They who had so recently witnessed his animated, and evidently heartfelt delivery of "The Squeeze for Saint Paul's" would never admit a suspicion of his loyalty; and the exalted personages who, most of all, would have been insulted by the supposed slight, entertained the most benevolent feelings toward the performer,—feelings which were never, for a moment, intermitted.

Passing by "The Dependent," of Cumberland, performed only one night (20th October), and never published, we come to Bannister's performance of Hairbrain (23rd January), in Holcroft's comedy, "The Man of Ten thousand."

As this was the first part played by Bannister, as the original, in a piece of this author's, a few lines may be bestowed on him. Holcroft was one of those men of genius, talent, and perseverance, who rarely appear among us. Born in an humble state, trained to occupations of a low and servile kind, spurred on only by his own consciousness of ability and an aspiring mind, unaided by friend, adviser, or patron, he made himself master of much literature and of several languages. When he had educated

himself sufficiently to cast his humble slough, his passion for letters led him to make powerful exertions, and use all the rigours of self-denial for its gratification. His ambition was early directed toward the stage; and he hoped, by his literary and dramatic efforts, to extend his fortune and his fame. I was told by Waldron, that Holcroft, on his first coming to town, lodged in a garret in his house; but his growing success enabled him to descend, until he reached the first floor, and then he took a house for himself.

But wealth and fame did not flow suddenly upon him: he never made much progress as a player; as a dramatic writer, his preface to "Duplicity" shows that he supposed he had reason to complain; yet, by his persevering industry, he made himself of value to the booksellers, and was esteemed as a poet, a writer of criticisms, a novelist, and a translator. His plays were performed with various, but generally good, success: the translation of "Figaro," and "The Road to Ruin," conferred on him emolument and reputation.

Unfortunately, he did not escape the contagion of politics: the French revolution set his ardent passions afloat; he associated with Horne Tooke and politicians of that caste, and was with them arrested and imprisoned in 1794. He was discharged without a trial, but continued to express his opinions

in politics without mitigation or reserve; the consequence was, that a certain jealousy attended all his productions. Many passages in his novels and plays, which, only a few years before, would have been derided as puerile or common-place, were now regarded as rancorous, dangerous, deadly effusions, adverse to government and hostile to the state.

These sentiments were at their height when "The Man of Ten Thousand" appeared. It was coldly received; and although propped by the talents of Kemble, Bannister, Miss Farren, Miss Pope, Mrs. Gibbs, and many more of the first comic actors, it could stand no more than seven nights, and then "fell to cureless ruin." It was given out by the author's friends, that a prejudice against his politics had impeded the success of his play; but no such motive to disregard is wanting. The comedy carries within itself the seeds of its own mortality. It is a mere series of scenes, without plot or contrivance. A false report causes an honourable, high-minded, and wealthy man to be suddenly considered as utterly ruined. He bears it like a hero; but a base band of pretended friends, like those of Timon, fly from his distress. The falsehood of the story is discovered, and then they are all eager again to tender their friendship; but they are repulsed with contempt.

Bannister's part was that of a giddy, flighty,

light-hearted coxcomb; fool enough to want to squander five hundred pounds, which he can only raise by borrowing, on a share of a quack medicine, of which he knows nothing but from an advertisement: but he is lucky enough, as Fortune favours fools, to gain a twenty thousand pounds' prize in the lottery; and generous enough, for fools and coxcombs are not always flinty-hearted, to lay it all at the feet of his patron and friend, not knowing that the cloud of his distress was already blown over. Whatever any other person might feel, Bannister had no reason to regret the discontinuance of this play, as the character he had to sustain was every way unworthy of him.

By Colman's permission, "The Son-in-law" ushered in the new year. Bannister was Bowkitt. There is some humour in this dancing-master, and Bannister gave his songs, to the tunes of Marshal Saxe's Minuet, and the Black Joke, remarkably well; but, after the impression he had made in Coupée, not much new effect could be produced. He often repeated the character at the Haymarket. Miss De Camp was most delightful in Arionelli; Charles Bannister, with his admirable falsetto, had sustained and given it a high reputation; but the archness, the whim, and the vocal talent of Miss De Camp made it a new character, which was seen

with pleasure even by those who had been most gratified by the original performer.

In a farce by Cobb, entitled "The Shepherdess of Cheapside," (20th February,) Bannister had a part, but what it was, or what the farce was about, I cannot discover: it was certainly played once, some say twice; but, in describing its fate, all pronounce what the children call a naughty word.

Kemble revived Wycherley's "Plain Dealer" (27th February), taking on himself the part of Manly, and Bannister performing Jerry Blackacre. It did not succeed in proportion to the merit of the writing and the strength of the cast. In the vital and essential part of the play, there is a grossness which may well disgust a modern audience, and prevent ladies of character from giving it their sanction. It has another misfortune. A scandalous coterie, where wit and slander are the order of the day, so strongly resembles that in "The School for Scandal," that, when Wycherley's play is on the stage, it appears to a portion of the audience to have been stolen from Sheridan, and that the true man has robbed the thief; yet the sterling merit of the play is undeniable. The author took his idea of Manly from "The Misantrope" of Molière; but, as Voltaire properly observes, Molière's "Misantrope" is a plain dealer, Wycherley's "Plain Dealer" a

misanthrope. It is impossible to peruse the English play without feeling warmly for the honest, generous, brave man, who is jilted by his mistress, cajoled by his friend, and robbed by both; and, although "it may show a little out of fashion," the ardent and enterprising, but humble, passion of Fidelia is extremely interesting. To expose and punish the false mistress and the treacherous friend, and to revenge Manly on them both, to their utter infamy and disgrace, are events so earnestly to be desired, that one can almost pardon the gross and odious means by which such an end is effected. But, in this part of the play, the situation of Fidelia, although truly affecting, is too disgraceful and indecent to be viewed without heartfelt pain.

In the underplot, the petticoat pettifogger, Mrs. Blackacre, and her son Jerry, form a treat of the highest flavour. She is so devoted to law and law proceedings, that her whole conversation teems with them, and one might believe that the only dictionary she ever consulted was *Les termes de la ley*. Poor Jerry, on the contrary, obliged to pretend that he is a student, kept a minor after all his junior schoolfellows have long been of age, reluctantly drags about his mother's well-stuffed blue bag; and attempts to put cases, while he longs, as he says, to wear red breeches, and partake in the frolics of the town.

It is curious in this piece to see what Westminster Hall was in the times of Charles the Second. Wycherley had been educated in the law, and, although he might caricature his figures, he did not draw them absolutely out of nature. The importunities of clients, the sharp and rugged behaviour of counsel, the tricks by which suits were fostered and evidence procured, were admirably displayed; and the scene in the Hall, when stalls were established, and books, toys, and various articles sold there, exhibit a display of bustle and drollery now totally abolished, but which was remembered by many with whom I have conversed. So great a favourite as this piece deservedly was in its own days, it is a subject of regret that it is lost to ours.

A scene of great curiosity, and, in the dramatic world, great importance, arose in the production of "The Iron Chest," by George Colman (12th March). The two principal male characters, Sir Edward Mortimer and Wilford, were played by Kemble and Bannister. After being performed four times, it was withdrawn from Drury Lane, reproduced with success at the Haymarket, and then published. The circumstances attending the whole transaction are deserving of notice.

"Caleb Williams," a novel by Mr. Godwin, a political writer of the description then called Jacobinical, furnished the outline of the piece. But Mr.

Colman says, that much of Godwin's story he has omitted, much which he has adopted he has compressed, much added, and much altered, cautiously avoiding politics, with which "Caleb Williams" teems. His known and well-tried dramatic skill had enabled him judiciously to combine his materials; Storace composed the music; and the highest talents in the theatre, male and female, were combined to promote its success: yet it failed; and although exhibited with applause at Colman's own theatre, where Mr. Elliston played Sir Edward Mortimer, it never was well received elsewhere.

Irritated and disappointed at this his first failure, the author poured forth his rage in one of the most angry, or, to use the proper word, scurrilous prefaces that ever escaped from the pen of an exasperated writer. It is, throughout, an attack on Mr. Kemble, (for to all the other performers he confesses his obligations,) both as a manager and an actor. The piece was prepared, at the request of one of the proprietors of the theatre, for the purpose of presenting Mr. Kemble in a character not less prominent than that of Octavian; it was sent piece-meal, and put into rehearsal as it was received.—Rehearsal! "ay, there's the rub." Mr. Colman says it was never rehearsed at all, for at every such attempt some principal performers were absent. On the other hand, it is asserted that Mr. Colman was

never, in person, or by any friend, present at a rehearsal, to add, suppress, or transpose anything, as it might appear requisite.

When the night of performance came, Mr. Kemble was suffering under severe indisposition; and, as the author tells us, at the moment when the piece was to begin, in his dressing-room taking opium-pills. Yet he would not disappoint the crowded audience which was assembled, and he hoped to be sufficiently re-established in health to sustain the character. He had caused it to be advertised; and, when it was too late to recede from the performance, he stimulated his powers by extraneous means, hoping that the urgency of the scene would give an additional impulse to his languid powers. The piece was, in the first act, not well received; the scenes were too long; and the part of Adam Winterton, a superannuated steward, affecting the tastes and tricks of youth, admirably played by Dodd, gave offence, and encountered some disapprobation. In this unhappy state of things, hurt in his feelings as stage-manager, depressed and rendered irritable by his indisposition, and fearful for all the interests which were at stake, Mr. Kemble, at the end of the first act, was pressed by one of the proprietors, and still more by the author, to make an apology. He said his illness was obvious to the whole house: if an apology on that score were necessary, it should have

been offered before the piece began; but, if he were to present it at that period, he must look like a fool. Yet, after Dodd had a second time been exposed to disapprobation, Kemble did express to the audience his anxiety lest any defect in the performance arising from him might injure the success of the play, and his hope that, on a future occasion, he should be enabled to do more justice to the character. A week was expended in curtailments, alterations, and improvements: it was reproduced with no more than negative success; it was not damned, but it was not cordially received.

Such were the circumstances which brought forth the petulant preface to which allusion has been made. From the narrative part, the statement here offered has been drawn. Of the abusive portions it may be said, that no particular of Kemble's person, powers, or defects is left unscandalized. The author required, he says, "a man

'Of a tall stature, and of sable hue,
Much like the son of Kish, that lofty Jew;'

'A man of whom it might be said,

'There's something in his soul,
O'er which his melancholy sits and broods.'

Look at the actor!" he proceeds, "and will anybody do him the injustice to declare that he is deficient in these qualifications?" And all this abuse of his person and appearance is followed by an in-

vective, quite uncalled for, on his dramatic production of Lodoiska,—his stately deportment, reserved temper, mysterious, cold, impenetrable manner, which rendered him thoroughly adequate to the representation of Sir Edward Mortimer.

Two passages of sarcasm on his general qualities, and his performance in this play, may be worth extracting as a specimen:

"The arrogant fault of being more refined than refinement, more proper than propriety, more sensible than sense,—which nine times in ten will disgust the spectator,—becomes frequently an advantage to him in characters of this description. In short, Mr. Kemble is a paragon-representative of the *Lusus Naturæ;* and, were Mr. Kemble sewed up in a skin to act a hog in a pantomime, he would act a hog with six legs better than a hog with four."

On his playing this part, Mr. Colman says, "Frogs in a marsh, flies in a bottle, wind in a crevice, a preacher in a field, the drone of a bagpipe, all—all yielded to the inimitable and soporific monotony of Mr. Kemble."

Even a phrase in general use, and uttered in a private conversation, was not forgotten; and Mr. Kemble was reminded how easily, and upon how many occasions, he had shown that he could "look like a fool."

This preface was calculated, as it was intended,

to injure Kemble and to give him pain. From the last effect he was protected by a philosophical temper, and a manly confidence in his own powers, and from lasting injury by his allowed and unrivalled talent. It is mortifying to see two such men placed in such a state of undignified opposition. Their elevated station in their respective arts gives importance to that which would, as between two inferior people, appear trivial and deserving no more than the remark of the day. Had Dennis and Gildon only abused one another, they would now remain unheard of; but their attacks on Addison and Pope have preserved them in a state of despised celebrity.

After the second edition of the "Iron Chest," the author yielded to the general voice of censure, and suppressed the preface: but it was too much diffused to remain unknown; and, when it became scarce, it was reprinted in a weekly paper. Pity that a man of Colman's genius and talent should have left such a memorial to stain his reputation; a lesson to all who publish, that, if their vicious productions are repented, they cannot be recalled. But, recollecting Kemble's friendly and noble conduct with respect to "The Mountaineers," Colman should never have given himself such an occasion to repent.

Bannister is allowed by the author, and by all

critics, to have performed Wilford admirably. His firm truth, his genuine affection, and his heroic suffering, touched every heart; and, although little opportunity was allowed for the exercise of his comic powers, the part when played by him was always well received. He took it for his own benefit in the ensuing season at the Haymarket.

Mr. Kemble was attacked from another quarter on the production (2nd April) of "Vortigern." A short notice of this transaction may be excused, although Bannister had no share in it; for he neither uttered an ejaculation at sight of the manuscripts, bore a part in the play when it was acted, nor wrote a pamphlet on either side of the question.

A young gentleman, named Ireland, had, with considerable diligence, acquired the means of imitating old hand-writings, and of colouring ink to the hue of that which had been fluid nearly two centuries before. He had also collected several printed books of the time of Shakspeare, and as much waste paper as he could find bearing the water-marks so well known to critics and collectors. Thus prepared and furnished, he wrote in the margins of the printed books many notes, and on the paper several pieces of poetry and prose, and some dramatic works. Premising that he had found these treasures in a chest, but that he would not give any

account how it came into his possession, he invited the literary world to inspect his wonderful discovery. The opinion of many persons, eminent for their learning and critical ability, was firmly pronounced in his favour; some were ridiculous in their raptures, others almost profane in their exultation. There was, however, a band of sceptics, headed by Mr. Malone.

"Vortigern" was one of these new-found treasures. It was purchased by the proprietors of Drury Lane for a liberal sum; cast in the strongest manner; heard by a crowded audience with profound and anxious attention; and finally condemned, not with the eager impatience which denotes prejudice or malice, but after folly and absurdity had become so grossly evident that further endurance would have been the sign of passive stupidity.

When, as an acting play, "Vortigern" had been thus disposed of, a vigorous controversy arose among the critics, which assumed a curious and unusual aspect. On the day of the performance, Mr. Malone had published his animadversions under the title of "An Inquiry into the Authenticity of the Papers." Mr. Ireland complained of this as "an undue stratagem, a mean and petty artifice, contrived to prejudice the public mind, and help off a few copies of the volume." As Mr. Malone's book comprised four

hundred and twenty-four octavo pages, it is not easy to apprehend how it could pervert the understanding of those who must be in the play-house by six o'clock in the afternoon; or how the sale of such a book, in the day, would be much promoted by the notion that it must be read in order to form an opinion of a play to be performed that night. After the piece had been condemned, critics did not venture still to maintain its authenticity; they contended that Mr. Malone had based his judgment on grounds which were untenable: but this controversy soon lost its interest by Mr. Ireland publishing a confession of the deception he had practised, and a full disclosure of the means he had employed.

Indignation was expressed on this matter with far more vehemence and depth than was required. The trick was much to be condemned, as a deliberate and systematic deception; but no malignity was indulged, no public principle was assailed, no private property invaded, no historical fact was thrown into doubt, no one's memory was slandered, nor did this author, like Lauder, attempt to blast those laurels which ages had consecrated, and which were connected with the literary renown of the nation. Probably much of the clamour arose from those whose pride was wounded by the acquiescence of their judgment in the fraud. One strong instance came to my knowledge, which

showed how powerfully Ireland's attempt was aided by those whose wishes that the papers might prove genuine made them close their eyes against the clearest conviction. An artist of the first eminence told me that, when he had looked at the papers, a pen-and-ink drawing was produced, as made by Shakspeare. "I could see, in an instant," he said, "that it was nothing original, but a copy of a bad wood-cut; and yet I would not suffer my mind to be undeceived, but went away a believer in the authenticity of the Shakspeare manuscripts."

Mr. Ireland published "Vortigern," with much abuse of Mr. Malone, and some of Kemble; but, if any one can be persuaded to read it, whatever he may think of the critic or the performer, he will surely be convinced that the audience would have acted justly in rejecting it, even if it had been Shakspeare's.

"Mahmoud, Prince of Persia," by Cobb, was in the hands of Storace, when his death prevented the completion of the music, and was played (30th April) for the benefit of his widow and children. On this occasion, Mr. Braham, who had made himself so advantageously known, nine years before, as Master Braham, at the Royalty theatre, came forward, a full-grown though still very young man, to sustain a principal part. His fame was at once established: cold, indeed, and unworthy the name of a judge, must

that person be who did not bound with delight at the animated strain, "Though pleasure swell the jovial cry," or melt into tenderness at the delicious melody, "From shades of night." Mr. Kelly, highly competent to decide, pronounces Braham the greatest vocalist of the day; and adds, that, in a long professional intercourse, he ever found him replete with liberality and kindness, and ready to give his meed of applause to real merit. Is it necessary to remind the reader, that at this time, fifty years after his juvenile appearance, and forty-one since his mature engagement, Mr. Braham continues to captivate the public by his vocal powers, and by his taste and industry still contributes to their gratification?

This piece was played fifteen times, but not reproduced in the following season; two of the principal performers being absent on a tour, some called it a trip, to Italy.

Kemble lent his powers to a part altogether beneath them: Bannister appeared in one which was called comic, but was void of vivacity, and presented neither in language nor event anything in which his talents could be distinguished. The chief fun arose from his being buried alive, like Sinbad the sailor, because his wife chose to die before him; an incident which has lately been reproduced in the farce of "The Illustrious Stranger."

Deputy Birch again favoured Bannister at his

benefit (2nd April) with a new musical farce, "The Smugglers." His part in it was that of Trim, a brave and honest sailor, who, when the ship is wrecked, remains faithful to his captain, rescues him from the ocean, secures his property by concealing it, and defends it valiantly and successfully against a band of wreckers, miscalled smugglers, who endeavour to make it their prey.

For his father's benefit (21st May), after playing Sadi in "The Mountaineers," he appeared as Jobson, in "The Devil to pay." The humour of this farce lies chiefly with the cobbler and his wife; and, when Bannister and Mrs. Jordan played Jobson and Nell, the representation might be termed perfect. He gave, with its utmost force, the character of a stern, domineering, husband, yet not altogether void of good-nature or affection; she, the spirited, active, industrious, light-hearted, pleasure-loving, cottage wife, submitting to his will without a struggle, and enjoying every indulgence with eager merriment. A portion of the charm of this old-fashioned farce rests on the introduction of ballad tunes. Mrs. Jordan showed her acknowledged excellence in "Though late I was a cobbler's wife," and Bannister introduced with much effect an old ditty, "When Adam was first man alive."

CHAPTER XVIII.

1796—1797.

Bannister enters into an engagement with Mr. Daly,—goes to Dublin,—plays with great success,—returns to the Haymarket.—Sylvester Daggerwood;—an outline of the piece.—The Daggerwoods at Dunstable.—Cumberland's Don Pedro—Bannister in Sir John Brute;—plays Glib, in a Peep behind the Curtain.—Death of Dodd.—Moody and Bensley retire.—Marriage of Miss Farren.—Mr. Kemble gives up the management of Drury Lane;—succeeded by Mr. Wroughton.—Bannister plays Flutter, in The Belle's Stratagem.—The Charity Boy, by Cross.—Mr. Dowton plays Sheva.—The Force of Ridicule.—Misunderstanding about Miss Farren.—The Honeymoon,—an unsuccessful opera.—The Hovel.—The Shipwreck.—the Will, by Reynolds.—Anecdote of Cumberland.—Outline of The Will.—The Wandering Jew.—The Last of the Family, by Cumberland;—Visit of Bannister and Kelly to him at Tunbridge Wells.—Bannister in Stephano and Trinculo;—Charles Bannister in Caliban.—Bannister in Malvolio;—Little John, in Robin Hood.—The Deuce is in him;—Mrs. Siddons in Emily,—Bannister in Prattle.—Benefit for the Wounded in the sea-fight off St. Vincent's, and the Widows of those who fell.

DURING the late season at Drury Lane, Mr. Daly, the manager of the Crow-street theatre in Dublin, came to London for the purpose of engaging performers for the next year. Among the number were Kemble, Lewis, and Bannister; and their terms

were exactly the same. I have before me the draft of an agreement penned by a lawyer, and declared to have been "sealed and delivered (being first duly stamped) in the presence of," I presume, "one or more credible witness or witnesses." If Tristram Shandy had not anticipated me with his coach-and-horses covenant from his mother's marriage settlement, I would endeavour to amuse the reader by a display of the quaint verbosity with which a conveyancer can overload a common thought; but as that joke would be deficient in originality, and will hardly bear repetition, I will imitate my old friend Tristram, by communicating the sense in a few words.

Bannister was at his own expense to go to Dublin, to play twelve nights at Daly's theatre, and no other, three nights in a week, and to receive for each night fifty pounds. He was to play two additional nights without any salary, the one nominally for his own benefit, the other avowedly for that of Daly; but all the money was to be the perquisite of the manager, unless it should happen that some friends of the performer might make gratuitous presents, or pay extra prices for tickets; in which case the surplus money, on his own night, was to remain with the performer.

In pursuance of this engagement, Bannister appeared (27th May) at the Crow-street theatre, in

Colonel Feignwell and Walter. His reception was most flattering; he was not merely popular, he was a fashion in Dublin. The round of his characters comprised, beside the two already mentioned, Marplot, Sir David Dunder, Gradus, Young Philpot, Lenitive, Robin, Sylvester Daggerwood, Scout, and Shift, Smirk, and Mother Cole. Such was his success, that the house filled constantly when he appeared; and it is even said that on some occasions applicants for places were disappointed to the amount of one hundred and fifty pounds per night.

Returning then to, theatrically speaking, his native spot, the Haymarket, his appearance in Bowkitt and Walter was hailed with a tumultuous applause, which conveyed to his mind the grateful assurance that his short absence had not cooled his admiring friends.

"Sylvester Daggerwood" has been mentioned as the name of a character performed by him in Dublin. He had played it once for his benefit, during the preceding season at Drury Lane; it gave its name to an afterpiece; it formed one of Bannister's strongest and most peculiarly excellent parts, and became from its first exhibition (7th July) a stock-piece at the theatre. The part of Sylvester was originally comprised in the prelude called "New Hay at the Old Market;" but, as the main body of that very clever piece was too much connected

with temporary occurrences to be fit for constant representation, this lively portion was severed from the rest, and long retained its powerful attraction.

Sylvester Daggerwood is a strolling player in the last degree of wretchedness, but buoyed up by the love of his unprofitable profession, and borne out by spirits that never flag. His discourse is a basket of scraps, his demeanour a series of theatrical gesticulations and attitudes. His father is a prosperous button-maker at Birmingham; but Sylvester, having a soul above buttons, follows the muse, not through what we should call play-houses, but through barns and out-houses, where plays are murdered, and players, if not otherwise executed, at least reduced to skeletons. He marries one of the performers, who treats him with a sufficient number of children to constitute "a crowded house, though no great benefit;" and whose dinners are frequently "postponed by particular desire of several persons of distinction,"—principally, it is to be presumed, the butcher and the baker.

In this unhappy state, Daggerwood has left his family at Dunstable, to try for an engagement in London; and in a shabby, tarnished, ill-assorted suit, with a little old-fashioned three-cornered hat, adorned with the semblance of a gold button and loop, he presents himself in the hall of the manager's house, to solicit an interview; and being informed,

as he has been on several previous mornings, that the great man is engaged, betakes himself, as he had done before, to the porter's chair, and falls fast asleep.

To disturb his happy repose, comes in Fustian, a tragic poet, bound, like him, to the manager's drawing-room, to deliver the onerous cargo of a new tragedy; but doomed also, like him, to get no nearer than the chops of the channel. By the vehemence of his recitation, and not entirely without design, he awakens the sleeping Roscius, and a scene ensues of which no description can convey an adequate idea. The phrase, "playing up to one another," or, "playing into each other's hands," was never more perfectly illustrated than in this scene by Bannister and Suett. Caulfield was introduced, and gave some admirable imitations; but, after his death, his part was suppressed, and the piece was not the less attractive.

From the moment that Bannister starts from his chair, exclaiming, "Methought I heard a voice cry sleep no more," and Suett answers with tragic gravity, "you did, sir; that was my voice,"—to the last phrase they uttered, not a word, not a gesture from either, failed of producing laughter and applause. Daggerwood informs his new acquaintance, as he does every one else, of his name and engagement at Dunstable, where "his benefit is fixed for the 11th *of*

July, *by* particular desire *of* several persons *of* distinction." The tone, the false emphasis, the mendicant manner in which these words were delivered, rendered it impossible that the repetition, however frequent, should be tiresome; and the inimitable action with which, at the close, he presented a play-bill, was irresistibly comic. But the climax of the scene was, when the tragedian had for a moment tranquillized him so far that he sat down to hear him read part of his new tragedy. The listless discontent which he displayed during the description of the plot, and the first stage direction, to paint the moon behind a cloud, and his critical observation on the difficulty of executing such a design, sufficiently proved his awkward state of constraint; but when the poet recited a line which brought to his mind the "cloud-cap'd towers," all power of self-control was at an end. He sprung up, reciting the lines with furious emphasis; then, changing to Hotspur, he cried, "I can no longer brook thy vanities," and began fencing in an imaginary combat: afterward, with inconceivable rapidity, he placed himself in various heroic and comic attitudes; ending with Harlequin, whose step, nods, motions of the head and gestures of the body, he exhibited with perfect grace and address. The scene ends, and the parties are relieved, by an announcement that the manager is gone out to meet Mr. Bannister, junior, and Mr. Suett; on whom

each of them bestows a hearty d—, and they part friends.

As nothing precedes or follows this scene, nothing like a plot can be ascribed to the piece: it is like some French pieces; for example, "La Critique de l'Ecole des Femmes," and "l'Impromptu de Versailles," by Molière; or that excellent compliment which was paid to him after his death, called "L'Ombre de Molière."

Some years after the appearance of Sylvester Daggerwood, O'Keeffe wrote a sequel, called "The Daggerwoods at Dunstable," in which the hero is represented as arriving just in time for his benefit. The scene of his family; the detail of their theatrical powers; Mother Dabwall, who, by the aid of a miserable fiddle, forms the orchestra, and whiles away her tedious moments of leisure by posting the play-bills, constituted a scene of much humour and merit. But the good-natured author brought about a happy conclusion. From among the disconcerted passengers in an overturned stage-coach, issues old Daggerwood: he meets his son, pities his distress, looks affectionately on his daughter-in-law and grandchildren; a reconciliation is effected; he takes them home, and "rats and mice, and such small deer," are to be their feasts no more.

Cumberland contributed (23rd July) a new and not very successful piece of the tragic cast, called

"Don Pedro." It is a series of horrors and improbabilities. Bannister was Nicolas Sessinego, a barber-surgeon, whose benevolence and humanity bring him within the gripe of the inquisition; but the chief judge of that tribunal, becoming informed of his innocence, liberates him. The vengeance of the law is about to reach Don Pedro,—a robber, who has earned for himself the honourable name of the Devil, and is the perpetrator of all wickedness, and the contriver of all mischief,—when he evades public justice by suicide. No wonder that such a fable was not well received.

In the course of the season, Bannister appeared in several characters, of which some need not be mentioned. He played (8th August), without much success, Sir John Brute. This part has engaged the talents of many first-rate performers; but, at present, it is not easy to suppose, however well it may be represented, that an audience can derive much pleasure from a gross, licentious, stupid, vulgar libertine; "a fellow almost damn'd in a fair wife," or, as Signora Sporza says very pointedly of Zeluco, "un homme fait exprès pour être cocu."

For his own benefit, (5th September,) after "The Iron Chest" and "Sylvester Daggerwood," he brought forward Garrick's imitation of "The Rehearsal," "A Peep behind the Curtain." This piece, when first performed, had the most brilliant

success; it was played one hundred and eight times in one year: but any humour may be worn out; and although it was allowed on all hands that the part of Glib, the author, was admirably sustained by Bannister, no efforts could confer popularity on the performance, or attract audiences to witness the murder of the mythological fable of Orpheus and Eurydice.

During the recess, and after the opening, considerable alterations took place at Drury Lane. Death deprived us of Dodd, and time has not supplied his loss. It has already been mentioned, that the particular species of fine gentlemen in which he was so admirable has ceased to exist in society; of these therefore, it is unnecessary to speak: but should an event so improbable as the revival of "The Alchemist" occur, there is no person to compete with him in Abel Drugger; Watty Cockney, in "The Romp" can never be so well represented; he is unrivalled as Adam Winterton, in "The Iron Chest;" and, above all, Sir Andrew Aguecheek can hardly be placed in the hands of a performer whose size, appearance, and countenance, so well embody the idea of the poet, or whose admirable skill, and perfect knowledge of the stage and its business, can so well bring into light every trait of that most whimsical and extraordinary personage.

Moody, the friend and fellow-comedian of Dodd,

was not removed by death; but retired when nature had told him in private, what the town had intimated in public, that he had been long enough a player. He gained the hearty eulogy of Churchill for his Irish characters; but Time had rendered him too inert for the requisite expression of volatile vivacity, and, although in several pieces his loss would still be felt, it would not be irreparable.

Bensley also gave up theatrical life, to occupy a station more consistent with his original military profession; he was appointed a barrack-master, and carried with him the reputation of a perfect gentleman. His dramatic powers have already been noticed; and in many characters his absence could not easily be supplied.

But the great and distinguishing loss which the company sustained, occurred on the 8th of April, when Miss Farren, after performing the part of Lady Teazle with her accustomed and acknowledged excellence, bade adieu to the theatre. She did not speak her farewell; Wroughton uttered a short address; and Miss Farren, having curtsied to all parts of the house, left a void which has never been adequately filled. Her graceful person, elegant address, and exquisite representation of ladies of quality, could be seen and felt by all of every class; but it required a closer observation to discern that excellence which gave to her performance its highest

charm,—a delicate, genuine, impressive sensibility, which reached the heart by a process no less certain than that by which her other powers effected their impression on the fancy and the judgment. She retired from simulated to real dignity; being immediately, but not unexpectedly, elevated, by marriage with the Earl of Derby, to the rank of Countess.

After the professions which he had, no doubt, sincerely made, and the hopes which he had sanguinely expressed when he succeeded Tom King, Kemble, after encountering the numerous vexations, embarrassments, and disappointments which flow from an ill-replenished treasury,—a company whom want of pay often drove to mutiny and desertion,—after being harassed by the want, the insincerity, and the negligence of the principal proprietor,—found himself obliged to abandon the post he had so gallantly assumed. It is not necessary here to recapitulate, or even to point at, the causes of his just dissatisfaction: but, in ceasing to be manager, he did not withdraw his services; he continued to be a performer under the direction of Mr. Wroughton.

On the night of opening (30th September), the new manager having adopted the plan of the summer theatre,—that of giving three farces, instead of a regular drama and an after-piece,—Bannister appeared in Lenitive, and prepared the success of the

evening by inspiring the audience with hilarity and good-humour.

During the first two months, he played generally his accustomed characters. The only exceptions were (25th October), Flutter, in "The Belle's Stratagem," a lively, volatile, busy, blundering, but unimportant fop; and (5th November) a part in "The Charity Boy," a farce by Cross, which was graciously endured for one night, but at the close inexorably condemned, and never repeated.

While he was thus pursuing the course of his duty, he was superseded in a character which he had formed, nourished, and established. Mr. Cumberland, residing much at Tunbridge Wells, had witnessed the performances of Dowton, and, deeming him unrivalled in "The Jew," recommended him strenuously to the managers of Drury Lane, both on account of his general merits, and his particular qualifications for Sheva. In that part he appeared (11th October) with complete success, and founded a reputation which never deserted him. I purposely avoid comparisons; but it is fair to mention, that in this, as in many other instances, Bannister saw other performers brought forward in characters which he had made his own, without a murmur, with perfect complacency toward the manager, and with generous, liberal, and kind feelings toward those whom many would have considered as intruders.

Several new pieces, in which Bannister performed this season, were completely unsuccessful; and the fault was uniformly and justly ascribed to the authors. The first (6th December) was "The Force of Ridicule," a comedy, translated from the French by Holcroft, and condemned without mercy on the only night of its appearance. The night is celebrated as one in which Miss Farren had to apprehend the resentment of the audience for a failure on a former evening. In truth, the cause was pecuniary, and entirely between the managers and herself; and the public, after a short and not very clear explanation from Wroughton, spared the actress, who had not merited their displeasure, and hissed the play, which had no claim to their favour.

The next of these failures was an opera, written and composed by William Linley, called "The Honey Moon." It was played but once (7th January 1797); and the author, yielding to what he called an unjust cabal, withdrew it from the stage, and withheld it from criticism in the closet, for it was never printed. It must not be supposed that it was revived some years afterward in Tobine's excellent comedy: they were of no kin.

Another one-night farce, to which Bannister strove hard to give a prolonged existence, was "The Hovel," produced (23rd May) for the benefit of Miss Leak: the author kept his own secret.

Turning from these dramatic miscarriages to progeny of longer life, we may mention "The Shipwreck," by Mr. Arnold, with music by his father, Dr. Arnold; in which Bannister (20th December) played a sailor's part, by name Harry Hawser. The piece had some success, with no great merit: the usual attributes of a play-house sailor are some fun, with great pretension; a good disposition, disguised in forced, trite, unnatural sentiments; and clumsy and uncalled-for expressions of unbounded loyalty and devotion to his king and his sweetheart. Nobody had more of these commodities placed in his hands than Bannister, and no one could have disposed of them with more grace or to greater advantage.

A comedy called "The Will," by Mr. Reynolds, was produced (11th April); and it is said that, partly out of friendship to Wroughton, partly from a desire to frame a character which should exhibit all the powers of Mrs. Jordan, the author, who had before written mostly for Covent Garden, prepared this piece for the other house. He accounts for the matter much more naturally by saying, that necessity, "*et duris urgens in rebus egestas*," compelled him to write; that he commenced a part for Mrs. Jordan, laboured assiduously, and presented his work to Mr. Sheridan, by whom it was immediately accepted. It was successful; but a momentary displeasure in the audience occasioned a display of

temper in Cumberland hardly to be expected from a man of humanity, learning, and politeness, had there not been lurking in his mental constitution the maladies which are drawn into such strong light in the character of Sir Fretful Plagiary. He was unacquainted with the author; but rushing from the orchestra into the green-room while the critical hemisphere was overcast, and being introduced by Wroughton, he said to Reynolds with much appearance of irritation, "Let this be a lesson to you, young gentleman!" Soon the storm was dispelled; the comedy was crowned with complete success; and Mr. Cumberland had an account to balance between his sagacity and his civility, not having to add much feeling or liberality to the credit of either.

Bannister performed the part of Howard, well fitted to his talent; as blunt integrity, friendship immovable, a love of right defying all consequences, an enterprising disposition, and a joyous heart, constituted its great outline. Mrs. Jordan's character, Albina Mandeville, was that of a young lady who, having been brought up under the care of a fraudulent, interested, wicked female, called Mrs. Rigid, is by severe treatment on the one hand, and a sense of gratitude and affection on the other, which leads to an infantine deference and an unsuspecting confidence, so prostrated in mind, that she submits in everything to her governess, even to the extent of

permitting herself to be restrained in all her actions, and locked up in a dark room in her own castle by the order of her tyrannical ruler. As she has attained the age of eighteen, and is in love with Howard, this seems quite unnatural. Mrs. Rigid intends to marry her to an ill-bred pedant, her own cousin, on condition of receiving half her fortune; but this plot fails in consequence of the pedant, named Veritas, getting too much wine, and so conceiving a genuine love for truth, and disclosing the whole plot, with some other transactions not at all to the honour of his plotting relative: this is shallow and forced.

In the course of the piece, Albina, without any cogent reason, assumes the disguise of a naval officer, draws her sword on her lover, and is nearly engaged in a duel with him. From this burlesque situation she is relieved by an incident not less extravagant. Howard's uncle, Cynic, an unmitigated railer at women, is discovered in the cottage of Copsley, the gamekeeper, where he has been "holding an amorous parley" with his pretty daughter: the scene is not merely like, but exactly identical with, that of Square the philosopher in Molly Seagrim's boudoir. Amid this medley of incidents, the story, rather than the plot, proceeds; until the young heiress, sensible of the wickedness that has been practised, destroys the will made in her favour to

the prejudice of her calumniated father; restores him to his rights, banishes her governess, and marries her lover. By the exertions of Mrs. Jordan and Bannister, aided by the talents of King, Wroughton, and Suett, this play obtained a temporary acceptance.

Mr. Taylor, generally called Jack, well known as a wit, a punster, a good companion, and admirable writer of trifles, the author of many sportive pieces, prologues, and epilogues, and, above all, of the immortal Monsieur Tonson, aided this comedy by a lively, pleasant prologue; but it was more assisted by an epilogue, spoken by Mrs. Jordan, in which Shakspeare's seven ages was happily parodied.

For the benefit of Fosbrook, the box-keeper, (31st May,) a farce called "The Wandering Jew, or, Love's Masquerade," was produced. Its author, Mr. Andrew Franklin, was well known to the town; he had been connected with the periodical press, and had already written two or three dramatic pieces. In this, Bannister played Major Atall; and exhibited himself successively as an Italian count, an English sailor, and the Wandering Jew. Nothing could be more absurd than the plot; nothing more low and witless than the dialogue.

Probably Cumberland's unmannerly behaviour to Reynolds was, in some degree, occasioned by his anticipation of the fate which awaited a comedy of

his own, acted soon afterward (8th May) for Bannister's benefit. It was called "The Last of the Family." His character was Squire Abel, the son of Sir Adam ap Origen, a Welsh baronet; but, although the dialogue is commended, the plot was remarkably defective, and the piece was performed only four times.

Kelly narrates, in a very *naïve* manner, and with his accustomed good-nature, a visit which he and Bannister paid to the author at Tunbridge Wells, when he read this comedy to them after supper; and poor Michael, in spite of all his efforts to avoid irritating a man so susceptible, fell fast asleep, and snored before the end of the second act. Had Molière's housekeeper done so, probably the play which made her so drowsy would itself have slept in peace for ever; or had Cumberland, instead of the "Last of the Family," read "The Wheel of Fortune," Kelly would have kept his eyes open. Although Dowton had already been brought forward by Mr. Cumberland in Sheva, Bannister spoke a prologue in that character, and Mrs. Jordan had an epilogue with a song.

In the course of the season Bannister appeared in several characters, new to him, but long known and well established in the public opinion. In the Tempest (22nd February) he played Stephano, and, upon some other occasion, Trinculo; but, although marked

by some of the strongest touches of their great author's comic power, they are not calculated to confer fame on any player.

Far different is the undefined monster Caliban. His stupidity, his malice, his wildness, his fierceness, and his abjectness, are all of the most perfect description, and blended with wonderful skill. Combining, as he did, a deep and sonorous voice both in speaking and singing, a large and vigorous person, and great force in the management of all his advantages, Charles Bannister was an exact and stupendous representative of this hag-born monster; no contemporary or successor has given so perfect a delineation. It is impossible to exceed the vigour with which he ejaculated his curses, the humility with which he worshipped the "brave god who carried the bottle," or the appalling revelry with which he made the stage tremble under him, when he shouted "Freedom! hey-day! liberty! freedom!" and thuddered out his song,

> "Ban, ban, Ca—Caliban,
> Has a new master, get a new man."

For Suett's benefit (17th May) Bannister played Malvolio, a part requiring great ability in the performer, but never much desired by those who were either well established or rising in the profession. It had been filled in recent times by Henderson, Bensley, Kemble, and several others; but still it was

not generally coveted: perhaps it is because men do not like to appear merely for the purpose of being baffled and derided. Bannister did not acquire any celebrity in it, nor did it become one of his permanent characters.

To aid Sedgwick at his benefit (6th June), he took the part of Little John, in "Robin Hood;" but the opera was written for Covent Garden, and it was not meant to take root in Drury Lane.

For a whim, it may be supposed, Mrs. Siddons on her own benefit night (1st May) played Emily, in "The Deuce is in him." Miss Burney, in Evelina, justly termed this an elegant little comedy: it was written by the elder Colman, to explode by happy ridicule a silly notion, that a man was to be loved for himself alone; in other words, that if a person, endowed with beauty, honour, politeness, wit, wealth, and many other advantages, could be deprived of them all, still there remained a metaphysical self, which was to be the object of unvarying attachment. The reproof of this folly is happily and ably worked out; but the humour itself is as much out of date as the storming of the Moro, or the death of Don Velasco, so much referred to in the narrative. Bannister had the part of Prattle, a loquacious, news-relating, busy apothecary: it is, like the rest of the after-piece, well written, and at one time gave much celebrity to King. Could "The

Deuce is in him" have retained its place, and been frequently represented, Prattle, in the hands of Bannister, would always have been resorted to with pleasure; but there was nothing in Emily to claim the exertions of Mrs. Siddons, and the rest of the characters, although Florival was very well performed by Mrs. Goodall, and Colonel Tamper, by Palmer, had not strength sufficient to keep the piece alive in modern times.

A benefit was given at Covent Garden theatre (14th June) in aid of the fund raised by subscription to relieve the brave sailors who were wounded, and to solace the widows of those who fell, in the glorious action fought by Sir John Jervis against the Spaniards, on the 14th February, off Cape St. Vincent; a place dedicated to unfading memory, by giving the gallant victor his title as an earl. The performances were "The Country Girl," and "No Song, no Supper." Both theatres lent their aid,—Bannister appeared in his accustomed characters; the Opera-house supplied its dancers for the ballet of "Cupid and Psyche;" and Mrs. Abington on this glorious occasion emerged from her retirement to speak an epilogue, in which, if the fire of youth was no longer to be perceived, the evident warmth of heart made full compensation.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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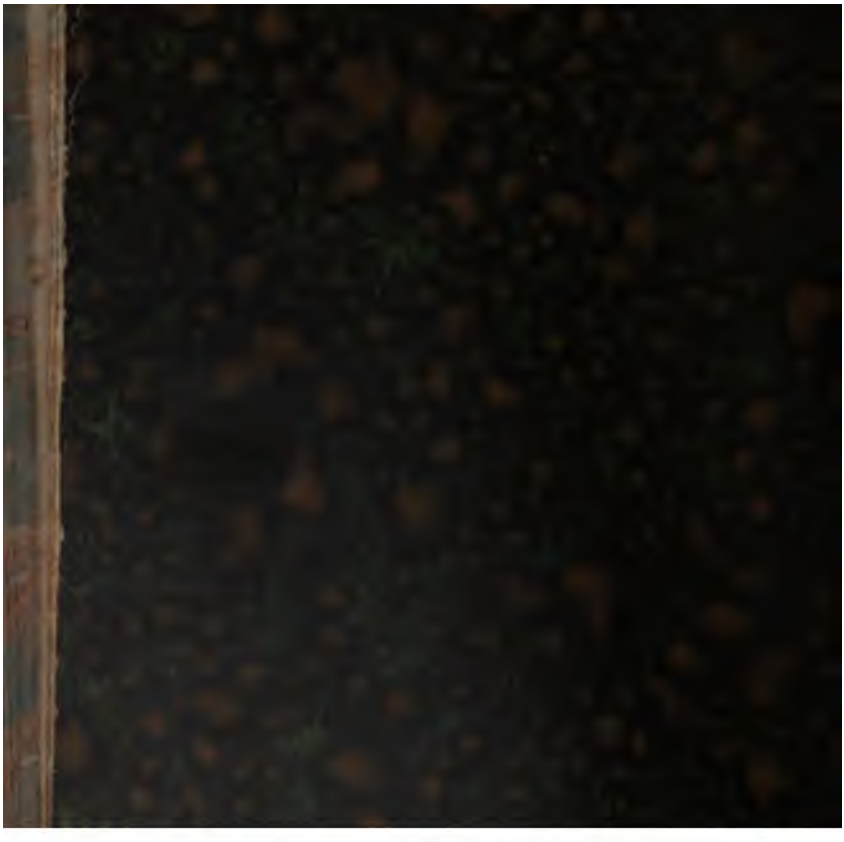

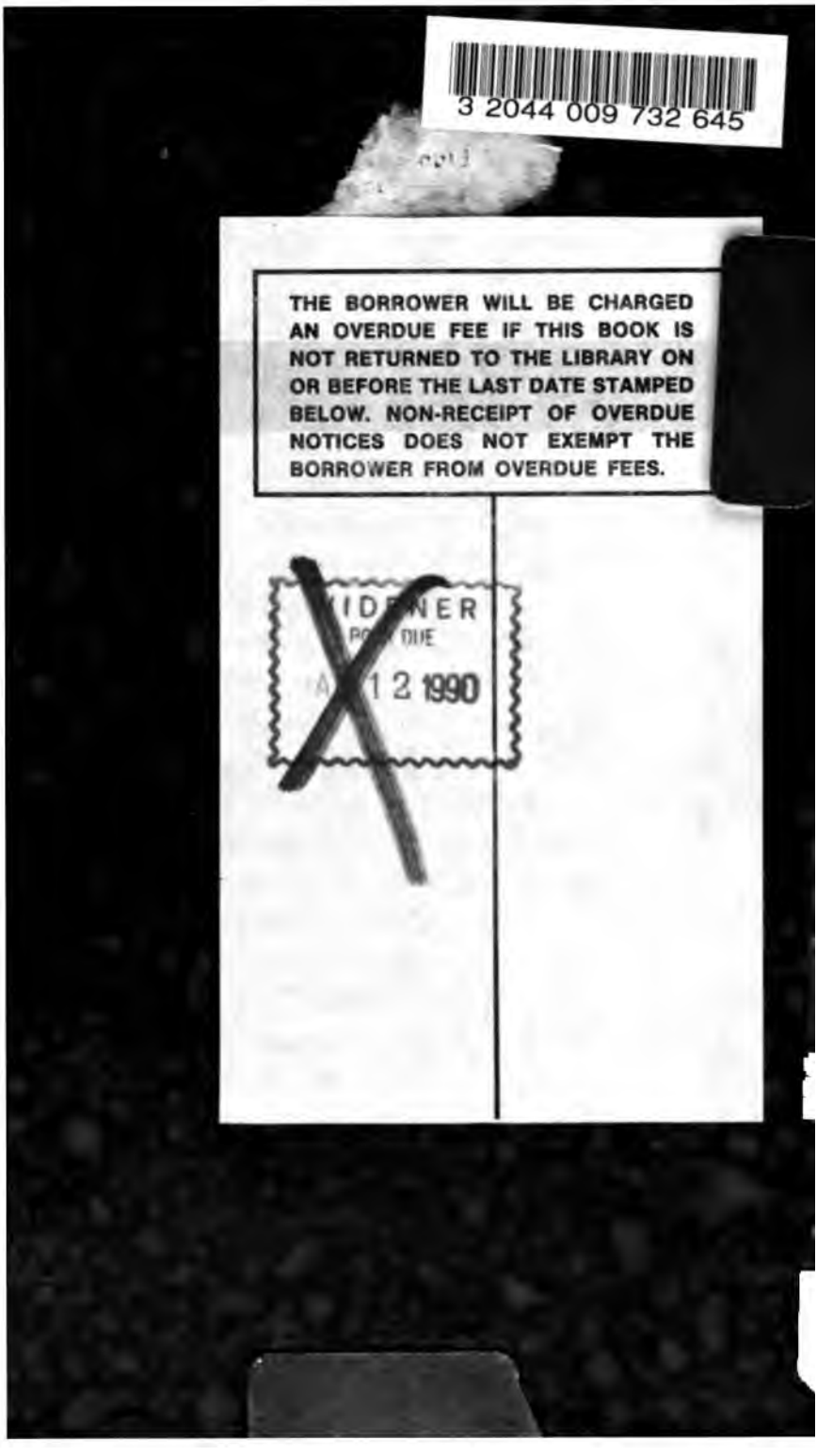
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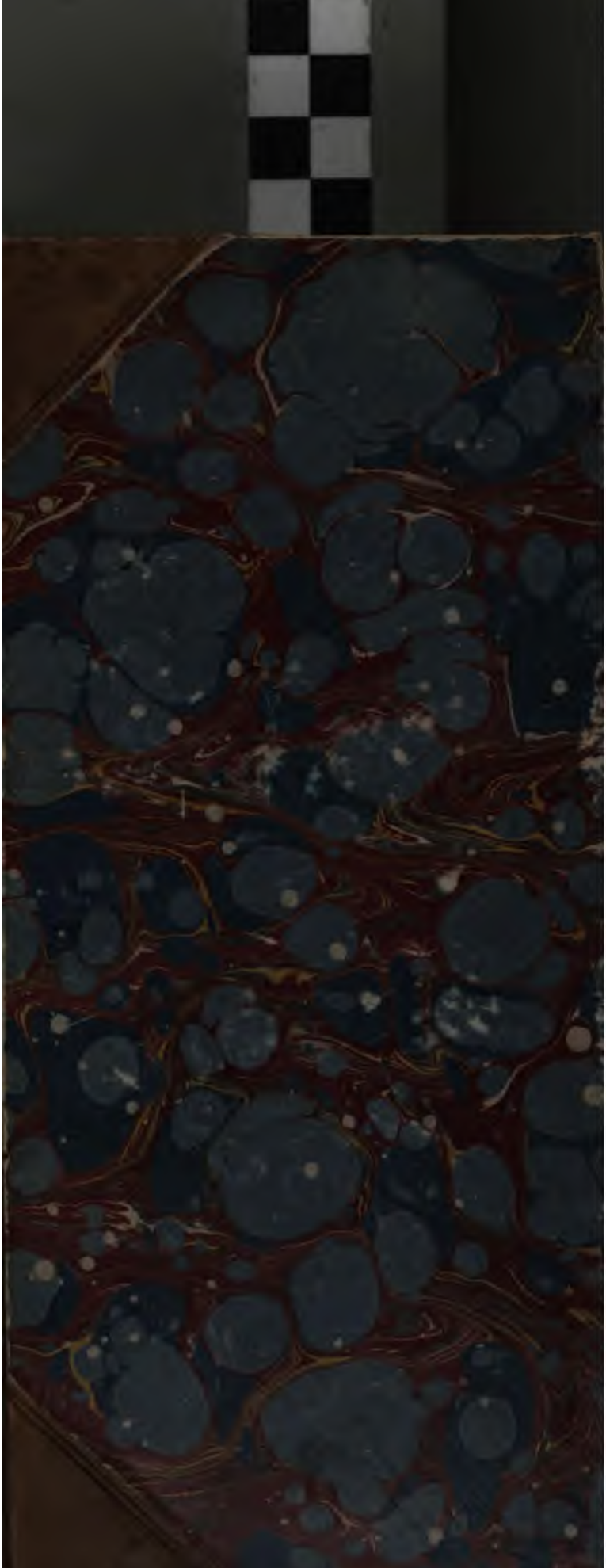
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